Sri Mookambika
The Radiant Grace

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MAP INDICATING ACCESS TO SOME HOLY PLACES IN THE COASTAL STRIP OF KARNATAKA AND NORTHERN KERALA

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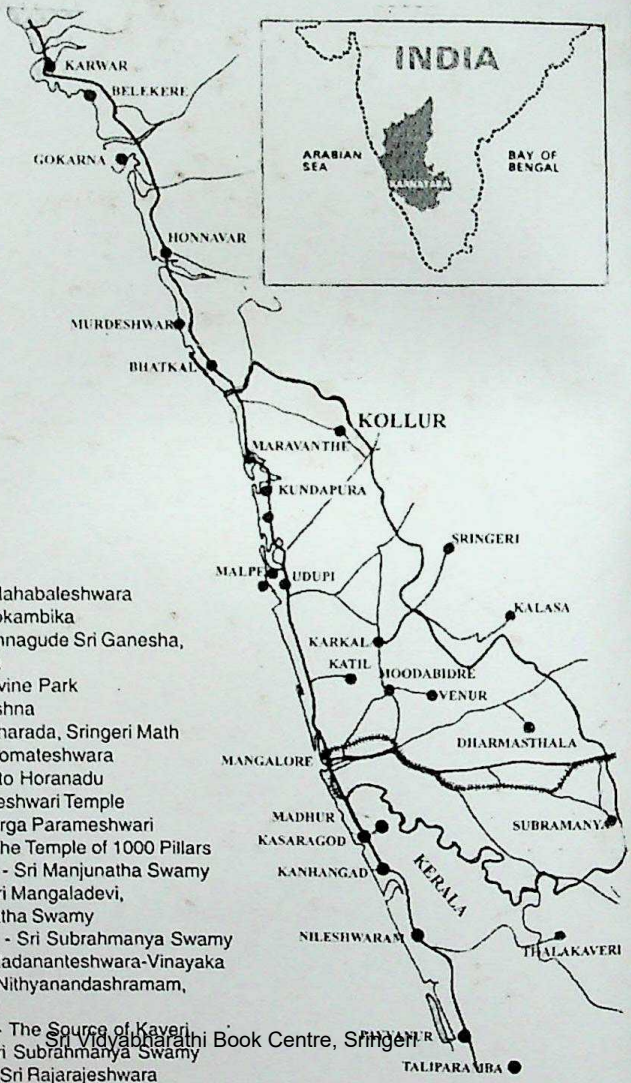

- Gokarna - Sri Mahabaleshwara
- Kollur - Sri Mookambika
- Kundapura - Annagude Sri Ganesha, Sri Koteshwara
- Saligrama - Divine Park
- Udupi - Sri Krishna
- Sringeri - Sri Sharada, Sringeri Math
- Karkala - Sri Gomateshwara
- Kalasa - Way to Horanadu Sri Annapoorneshwari Temple
- Kateel - Sri Durga Parameshwari
- Moodabidri - The Temple of 1000 Pillars
- Dharmasthala - Sri Manjunatha Swamy
- Mangalore - Sri Mangaladevi, Kadri Manjunatha Swamy
- Subrahmanya - Sri Subrahmanya Swamy
- Madhur - Sri Madananteshwara-Vinayaka
- Kanhangad - Nithyanandashramam, Anandashram
- Thalakkaveri - The Source of Kaveri
- Payyanur - Sri Subrahmanya Swamy
- Taliparamba - Sri Rajarajeshwara

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Sri Mookambika
The Radiant Grace

"Yea! knowing Me the Source of all,
by Me all creatures wrought,
The wise in spirit cleave to Me,
into My Being brought."

from *The Song Celestial*,
a poetic version of the Bhagavad-gita
by Edwin Arnold

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OUR MISSION

Modern biologists have to a great extent traced the mechanical laws of evolution whereas India's sages through their deeper search discovered the laws of Eternal Values - *Sanaathana Dharma* - the spiritual thrust inherent in the life-stream prompting it to ever greater realms of unfoldment.

It is this awareness of the spiritual impetus beyond mechanism that helped India renew herself every age - a capacity so well highlighted in the words of Dr.Jagdish Chandra Bose: "By a continuous living tradition of rejuvenescence this land has readjusted itself through unnumbered transformations."

This vision of progress through constant inner renewal, correction and expansion guided by the wisdom of a heritage that boldly explored into the very Essence of life, has equipped India to make significant contributions for the further evolution of mankind.

Presentation and promotion of the life-transforming values discovered by India's explorers of Truth, with a modern orientation suited to our times, is a need of these days of turbulence, to strengthen human consciousness and spirit, and we are dedicated to this mission.

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Sri Mookambika
The Radiant Grace

Srikant

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SRI MOOKAMBIKA
The Radiant Grace

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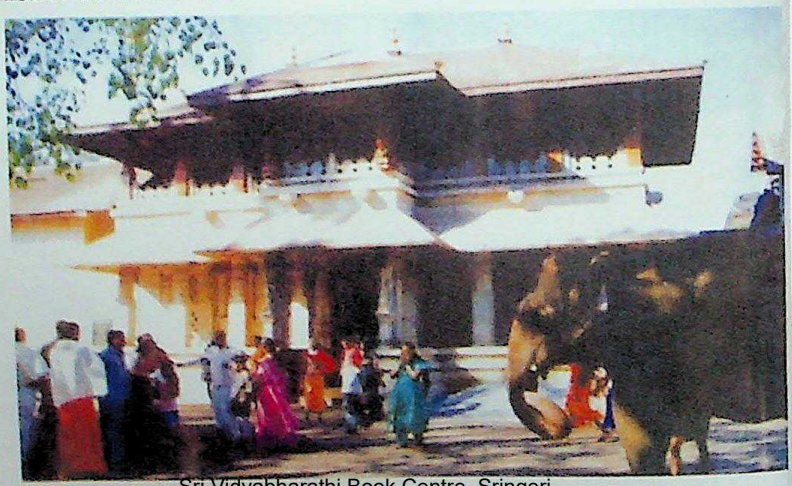

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The eastern Gopuram, the main entrance *(Photo: Jurgen Berg)*

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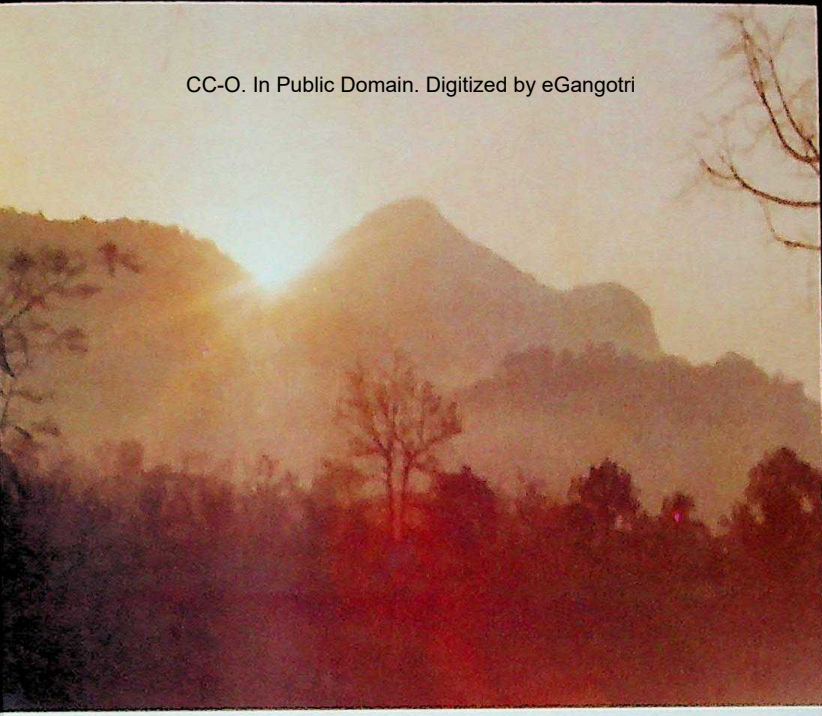

Dawn at Kudajaadri peak facing the shrine (Photo: Srikant)

Contents

- Foreword
- Modern Man and Pilgrimage
- The Temple of Divine Mother
- The Legend and its Message
- The Holy Places Around
- Sri Mahalakshmi Ashtakam

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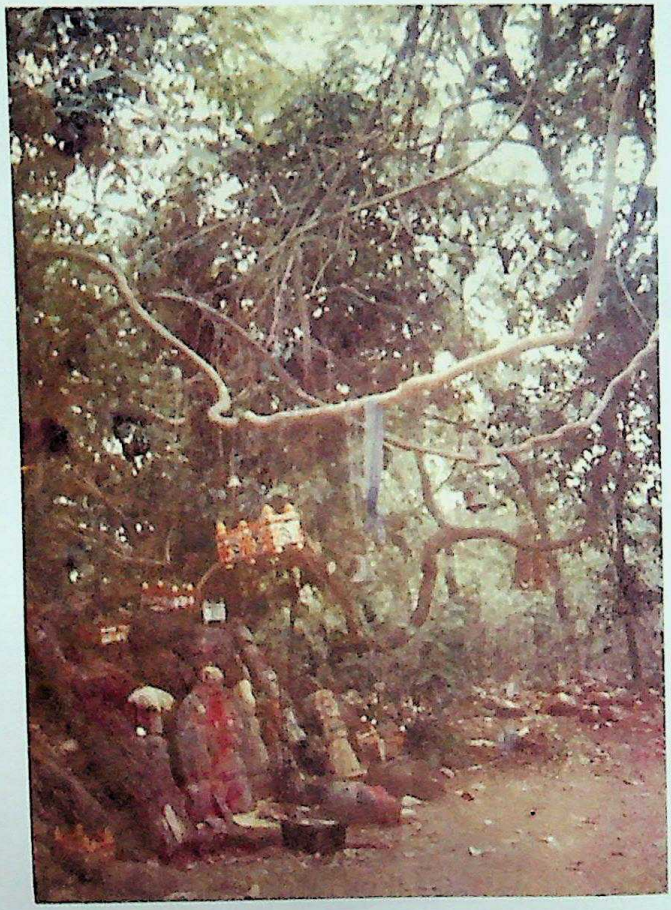
Masthikatte, *the grove of the guardian deities of the forests by the main road, about three kms before reaching the temple of Sri Mookambia. The ancient environmentalists exhorted us to recognise the divinity of Nature and protect her bounties with care and reverence.*

(Photo: R. Srinivasan)



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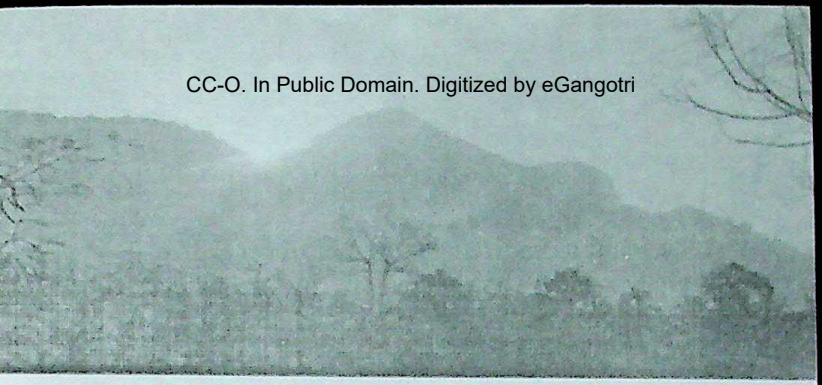

FOREWORD

THE ADVENT OF English education and the onrush of modern scientific knowledge brushed aside, in the initial phases, India's deep vision of the inner nature of man and his destiny. As a result we Indians also began to think that the only knowledge was knowledge of the objective world. However, the emergence of great spiritual personalities like Sri Ramakrishna in the East and matured scientific minds in the West has helped to put a check to this retrogressive trend.

Now, the educated in India and elsewhere are giving more serious attention to ancient Indian thought and wisdom. This beautiful book, *Sri Mookambika: The Radiant Grace*, reflects this modern trend.

While science brings a great deal of knowledge about the external world, it is still very much ignorant about the inner nature of man. Unless man gets a firm grip on his real nature, all his deep knowledge of the external world may, as we see today, turn to be a curse because of the disproportion in his understanding of the inner Reality and its creation, the outer world.

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If he acquires knowledge about his inner Self and thereby achieves control over his own mind and senses, he becomes wise and strong enough to be a master of any situation and his own destiny. Then, his knowledge of outside nature becomes a boon to him and society. Then only can he be called a progressive man, a man of knowledge, as said in *The Bhagavad-gita*.

Temples and pilgrim centres are the universities from where man can learn his lessons of Self-knowledge.

The shrine of Divine Mother Sri Mookambika, surounded by the soul-stirring sylvan charm of the Western Ghats, is such a centre providing an excellent venue for spiritual seekers. This book gives a beautiful description about this pilgrim centre. For the seeker who wishes to worship the Almighty in the form of the Divine Mother in this ancient place of spiritual communion, this is a very good guide. I wish the book warm reception from the public.

Swami Sakrananda
President, Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama
Thiruvananthapuram - 695 010

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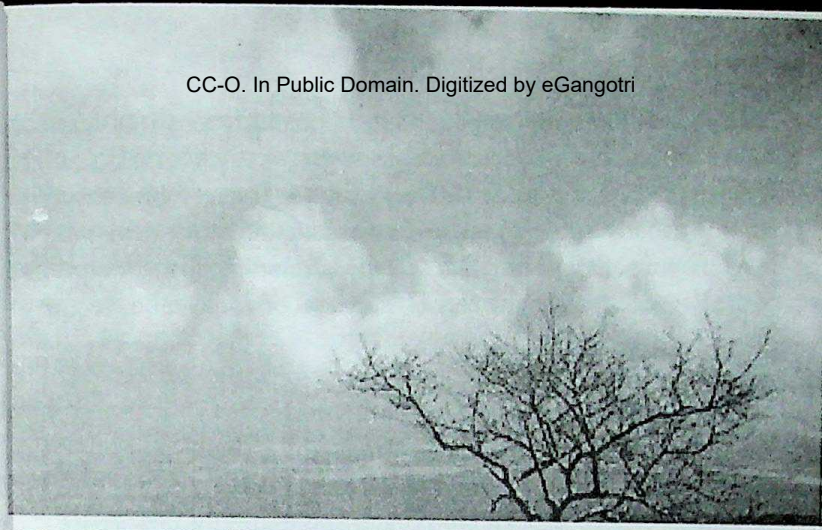

Modern Man and Pilgrimage

'THE MOST BEAUTIFUL and the most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical," says Albert Einstein, "It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead; his mind and eyes are closed. The insight into the mystery of life, coupled though it may be with fear, has also given rise to religion. To know what is impenetrable to us really exist, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms, this knowledge, this feeling is at the centre of true religiousness."

This vision of the greatest genius of modern science points to the goal of all enquiries - the most radiant beauty within. As scientific knowledge advances, wisdom slowly dawns in the modern mind that in the unknown depths of the atom and of the universe what man encounters is the mystery of his own depth.

Not long ago it was thought that science would ultimately

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overthrow all age-old spiritual concepts and reconstruct human society on a purely materialistic basis. But as science makes rapid progress today, we see a different picture - every branch of it tending to converge with reverence to something 'mystical' which is 'the source of all true art and science.' Standing on the footprints of the Rigvedic sages, the earnest scientist of today tends to pray:

> *"By a golden lid*
> *Hidden is the face of Truth*
> *Uncover it, O Sustainer*
> *Let the seeker behold it."*

This humble attitude of the scientist while facing the deeper questions is well reflected in the words of Werner Heisenberg, the renowned nuclear physicist, in his address to an assembly of science students: "Take from your scientific work a serious and incorruptible method of thought; help to spread it because no understanding is possible without it. Revere those things beyond science which really matter and about which it is so difficult to speak."

Thus two doyens of modern science declare that it is not unscientific to adopt a reverential attitude to the higher aspects of Nature, which are beyond our rational comprehension.

Discovering the Life of the Spirit

Modern man is pestered with tension. Doubts, anxiety and fear assail him. He tends to consider himself as a meaningless product of chance without hope and a destiny. He fails to recognize any sublime harmony between himself and the universe. Only when he acquires that saving sense which Einstein calls 'true religiousness' can he become happy with himself and his

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environment. From many of his clinical studies, Carl Jung, the eminent psychologist, is convinced that people who get relief easily from mental and physical afflictions are those who have turned to religion. Jung says, "We moderns are faced with the necessity of rediscovering the life of the Spirit. We must experience it anew ourselves. It is the only way in which we can break the spell that binds us to the cycle of biological events."

When one prays in a place of worship, the conducive atmosphere facilitates communion with the Inner Fact, which is the Supreme Source. Sincere yearning for spiritual expansion refines the mind, making one wiser, abler and happier.

Those who are exploiting religion and science, the two-uplifiting branches of human expansion, for narrow ends, have introduced evil in them. Modern man has to choose the freedom- giving spirit of these disciplines to rediscover the 'Life of the Spirit'.

A Centre of Spiritual Power

Spiritual centres function as divine dynamos and help activate the higher potentials in man, bestowing peace and happiness to the earnest seekers. There, they come in contact with the Reality within, gain strength to face misfortunes, acquire a new energy and hope and even experience miraculous turns in the course of life.

The renowned temple of Sri Mookambika is such a centre of spiritual power. Surrounded by the ever-green mountain ranges of the Western Ghats, the temple exerts an aesthetic and ennobling influence on thousands. Standing before the beautiful idol of the Divine Mother resplendent with spiritual grace, the devotee establishes contact with the Uncaused Cause of everything, of all

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forms and qualities.

Let us hope that the natural beauty will always be maintained in its verdant charm. Living in the modern technological civilization, we often tend to assault such places of delight in the name of 'development' destroying their sanctity and gracefulness. **Nothing should be allowed to mar the divine harmony of the place. All developments and constructions should go in tune with the natural charm. Each pilgrim should see that the holy places is kept always clean and beautiful, regarding this as his/her sacred duty.**

Let the trees bloom in their divine glory. New trees should be planted where the old ones have fallen. Let the serenity and grace of this region always prevail, as the tension ridden modern man has to visit now and then such sylvan abodes of quietude vibrant with spiritual power to seek that inward peace which reinforces him with inner strength and a greater vision.

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The rear side of the temple and the golden roof of the Srikovil, the central sanctum, facing the distant Kudajaadri peak, on the right.
(Photo: S.G. Padmanabhan)

The Temple of Divine Mother

ONE BEHOLDS FROM far-off places, as one nears Kollur, the awe-inspiring pyramidal peak of Kudajaadri jutting into the skies, its mystic heights declaring the location of the holy temple of the Mother of the Universe – Sri Mookambika. Encircled by the mountains, rich in lush tropical forests, the ancient temple is located by the gently flowing river with a charming name, Souparnika.

Kollur, a quiet place charged with heavenly peace, in the valley of Kudajaadri, is 140 kms from Mangalore city, on the north-eastern border of Udupi district in Karnataka State. Mangalore is accessible by air, train and bus. Kollur is about

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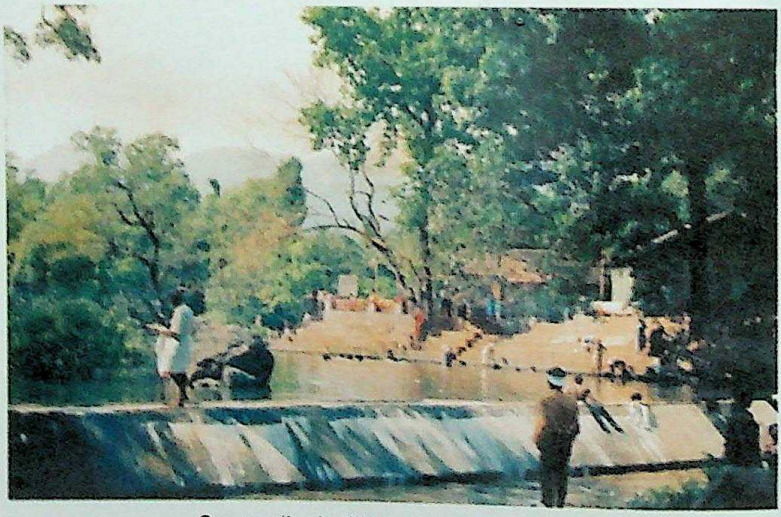
three and a half hours drive from Mangalore. Buses pass through the towns, Udupi and Kundapur. On the way to, or while returning from Kollur, one may get down in Udupi (about one hour drive from Mangalore) to worship at the famous Sri Krishna temple. While nearing Kundapur (one hour journey from Udupi) there is the Annegudde Sri Ganesha temple and Sri Koteshwara temple at Koteshwar. From Kundapur it is about two hours journey to Kollur via Byndoor and one hour and a half through a shorter route via Vandse. On the way via Vandse, 18 kms before reaching Kollur, there is an ancient shrine at Maranakatte where the great mystic symbol *Srichakram* is worshipped. This temple, which has a legendary association with Sri Mookambika temple, has a large collection of very artistically carved and painted rustic figurines of wood and stone of the chieftains and retinue of Sri



Souparnika bathing ghat (Photo:Srikant)

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Mookambika. The whole journey through the beautiful and undulating coastal strip of Karnataka, passing through villages, towns, holy places, bridges spanning broad rivers and roads winding through the rich green forests of the mountainous Sri Mookambika Wildlife Sanctuary, is very exhilarating.

From Bangalore there is a direct bus service to Kollur via Shimoga. (Distance: Mangalore to Kollur via Vandse 140 kms; Udupi to Kollur 84 kms. Kundapur to Kollur via Vandse 38 kms; Dharmasthala to Kollur via Manipal 220 kms; Sringeri to Kollur via (1) Nagodi 114 kms, via (2) Someshwara and Vandse 110 kms; Gokarnam to Kollur via Bhatkal and Byndoor 140 kms; Bangalore to Kollur via Shimoga 400 kms.)

Accommodation

The temple Guest House on the north side of the temple, Souparnika Guest House Complex indcluding the Yathri Nivas and Goenka Guest House, a little away towards the north and the Mathaa Sathram towards the west are managed by the temple; Sringeri Madom's guest house 'Sankarakripa'; Sri Ramakrishna Yogasramam; P.W.D Inspection Bugalow and several lodges provide accommodation. In olden days devotees used to get lodging and food in the houses of the temple priests, and this service is still maintained by some of them. For any special information one may write to: The Executive Officer, Sri Mookambika Temple, Kollur, Karnataka – 576 220.

Revitalizing

A few days stay in the holy place revitalizes the pilgrim. Bath in the clear, sweet water of Souparnika, winding amidst the forest

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scenes, is a lingering experience. Two main streams, Kashi-theertham and Agni theertham, originating from the Kudajaadri mountain, join at Kollur to form the Souparnika. The streams reach Kollur, flowing through forests rich in minerals and medicinal herbs. There is a cave, Garuda-guha, on the river bank near the main bathing ghat.

About one km away towards the north-west of the temple is the main bathing ghat with a small shrine of Sri Ganesha on the bank. One is in the midst of abundant variety of flora and fauna - langurs frisking in the trees, heavy-beaked hornbills winging their course over the river, flocks of green wild doves darting above.

After the bath the pilgrim worships Sri Ganesha, the remover

Sri Ganesha Temple at the Souparnika bathing ghat (photo:Srikant)

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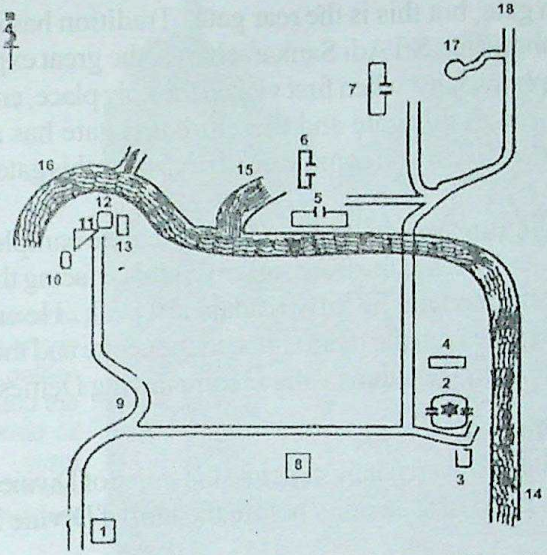

1. Bus-stand, 2. Sri Mookambika Temple, 3. Sri Ganapathi Temple, 4. Guest House, 5. Souparnika Guest House, 6. Yaathri Nivas, 7. Inspection Bunglow, 8. Maatha Sathram, 9. Way to Souparnika river, 10. Sri Ganapathi Temple on the bank of Souparnika, 11. Bathing Ghat, 12. ISCON Centre, 13. Garuda Guha, 14. Vaghni-theertham, 15. Kashi-theertham, 16. Souparnika river, 17. Dharma Peedam, 18. The way to Kudajaadri.

of all obstacles, and proceeds through the road lined with forest trees, viewing the glory of nature which culminates as the distant Kudajaadri peak. At the junction of the bathing ghat road there is a small shrine of Goddess Kaali, who is represented by a six-foot high anthill. Every marvel of nature is seen by the spiritual vision of India as a pointer to the infinte creative potentials of the Supreme Reality, and is treated with reverence.

Proceeding towards the east, one first reaches in front of the temple's western gate, and a newcomer is likely to mistake it for

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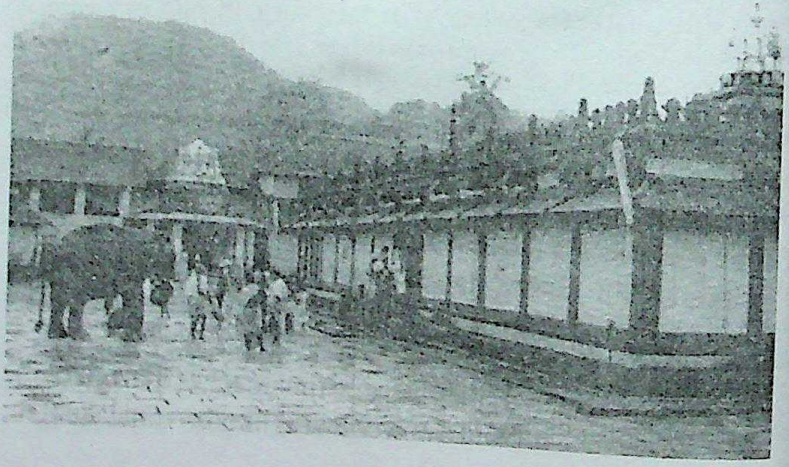
the main gate; but this is the rear gate. Tradition has it that the philosopher-saint Sri Adi Sankaracharya, the great exponent of Advaita philosophy, when first visited the holy place, entered the shrine through this gate and therefore this gate has a special significance. Except on some special occasions this gate remains closed.

The pilgrim takes half a round of the temple complex by the right side and reaches the front eastern entrance facing the rivulet Agni-theertham and the lofty Kudajaadri peak. He enters the vast open space with the main shrine in the centre and the shrines of the Parivaara Devatha-s – the accompanying Deities.

Divine Mother

The pilgrim reverentially steps into the shrine of Divine Mother. He stands in blissful serenity before the idol of Divine Mother,



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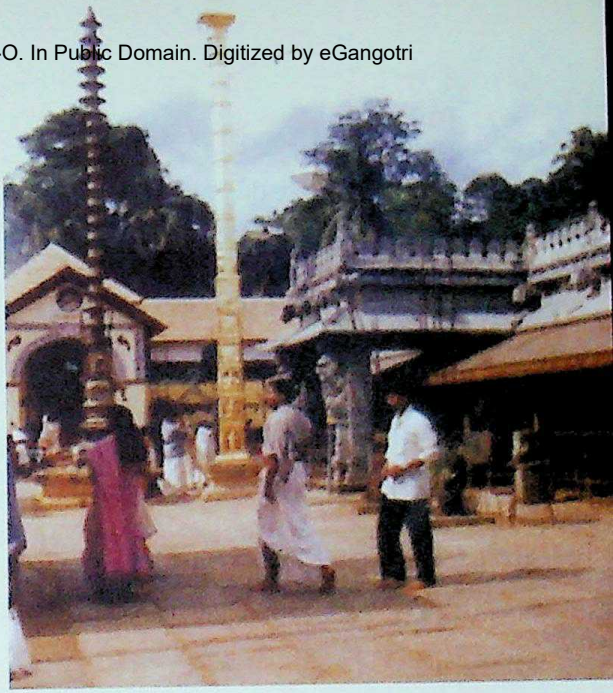

The entrance to the central shrine with the golden flag-staff and the many- tiered oil lamp (Photo: S.G.Padmanabhan)

Sri Paartheshwara Shrine (left) and Sri Panchamukha Ganapathi shrine. It is believed that Kola Maharshi did his penance at the place where Paartheshwara temple is located

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The golden top of the sanctum sanctorum (Photo: Jurgen Berg)

A hermit's hut by Souparnika (Photo: Jurgen Berg)

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emanating abounding grace. The peace that passeth understanding is an unforegettble experience.

The Mother of the Universe is represented in this ancient temple as a young girl, Her face beaming with boundless grace, sitting in the mystic *padmaasana* pose, four armed, holding the conch and the discus and expressing the *varada* and *abhaya mudra-s* (signs).

The beautiful *Moorthi* (a spiritually vibrant icon) made of an alloy of five metals *(panchaloha)* was, according to tradition, installed by Sri Aadi Sankaraachaarya. Before Sankara's arrival, there was only the *Jyothirlingam* in the shrine.

The Jyothirlingam and Its Significance

In front of the blissful form, projects a little above the floor level the ancient *Jyothirlingam*, almost flat and round, potent with great mystic power. Legend has it that it was self-born in the 28th *Dwaapara Yuga* of the present *Manvanthara*, when the sage Kola Maharshi was doing penance there. That means it is very very ancient. A *yuga* is a vast period of specified time span and a *Manvanthara* includes many such *yuga-s*.

The *Jyothirlingam* is divided into two unequal parts by a golden line, which will be sometimes shown to devotees by directing reflected sunlight towards it from a mirror. The left is the larger part.

The smaller part on the right of the golden line represents the conscious causative aspect of the supreme Reality, Brahman, and the left, its creative energy aspect, Shakthi. The golden line symbolizes their oneness. The right part figuratively represents Brahma (the terms Brahman and Brahma denote different concepts), Vishnu and Shiva, the causative principles of creation,

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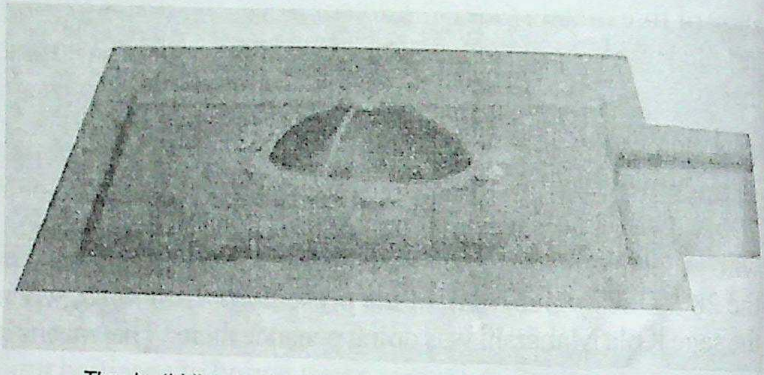
maintenance and dissolution. The larger left part represents Mahaa Saraswathi, Mahaa Lakshmi and, Mahaa Kaali, the three functional aspects of the active divine energy, Shakthi. Mahaa Saraswathi rpresents the aspect that playfully stirs up from itself a mystic rhythm to originate a Primordial Nature *(Moola-prakrithi)* of infinite possibilities and makes it evolve into infinite forms through the means of self-fortifying inbuilt knowledge and



The Jyothirlinga divided by a golden line into a large left and a smaller right prt

creative urge, Mahaa Lakshmi is that aspect of the Divine Power involved in the maintenance of the grand phenomena and Mahaa Kaali, the Power that withdraws the whole into the total oneness of Brahman. All these three great aspects of the Supreme Energy of Reality are predominantly represented in the *Jyothirlingam* as its left larger part, and that is why the supreme Divine Power is symbolized here by the graceful Mother Divine, Sri Mookambika. (In Indian philosophy the left side represents the female aspect, and Energy is considered feminine). According

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to the Thantra-science, the Divine Mother is the Supreme Source of all intelligent and mechanical forces of Nature. The Rishi-s discovered that when the all-controlling Mother immanent in man is invoked, his consciousness unfolds its higher dimensions and to the extent that he has achieved this he gets a certain degree of mastery over his mind and the forces of Nature.

Aadi Shankara's Beatific Vision

Aadi Shankarachaarya knowing the spiritual power of the *Jyothirlingam* visited the sacred place during his pilgrimages. There, the Supreme Reality splendoured in his consciousness during meditation in a most beautiful and magnanimous form as the Divine Mother. According to tradition it was in the same symbolic form of the Formless that he had perceived, the graceful idol was shaped and installed behind the *Jyothirlingam*.

The Form and its Meaning

The supreme Truth is thus symbolized here as the smiling form of Mother Mookambika. She has four arms. The upper left arm holds the conch and the right, the discus. The conch, which is blown to produce an auspicious vibrating sound, symbolizes the field of subtlest universal vibration, *Sabda Brahman*, the Spirit Energy foundation of the manifested universe, which is represented by the *Beejaakshara,* the seed vibration, 'OM' (ॐ). The discus symbolizes time and the cyclic nature of the phenomena of the universe. The lower left arm expresses the mystic sign of a*bhaya*, assuring freedom from all fear, and the right arm the *abheeshta* sign, assuring the fulfilment of life's natural desires. The form of the Divine Mother as a whole represents the transcendental Supreme Reality, the very Source

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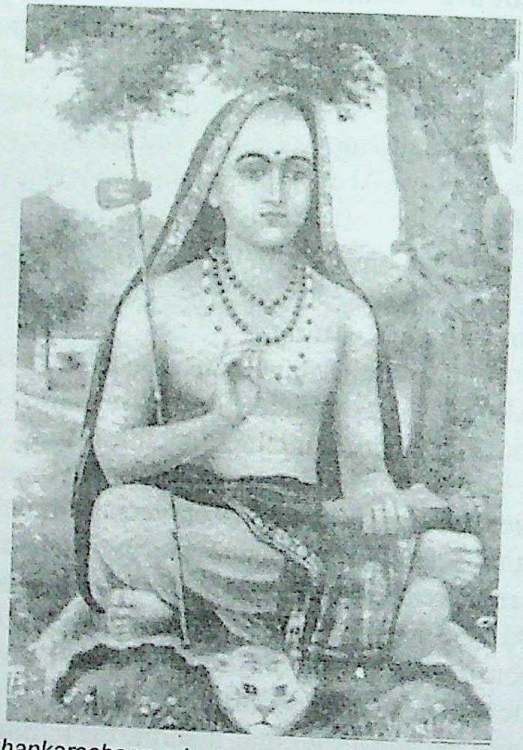
of the matter-time phenomenon. The *abhaya* sign symbolizes the fact that he who steadfastly directs his mind to the Supreme would find liberation from all fear through a deepening understanding of the glory and eternity of his divine dimensions, and the abheeshta sign reassures that such a one would invariably experience life's limitlessness, its meaning and fulfillment in Liberation. Thus the form of Sri Mookambika is a language



Sri Aadi Shankarachaarya had an ecstatic vision of Reality in the form of Divine Mother Mookambika at the holy place. Tradition has it that he sang his superb hymn, Soundarya-lahari *here, as he was worshipping the Mother.*

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pregnant with profound and sublime meaning.

The Skanda Puraana, an ancient epic, contains profuse accounts of the glories of this great shrine. In a legend relating to the temple, Indra, the king of gods, makes an interesting query to Sri Hari, who here represents the Supreme: "O the Supreme Brahman, now you are seen in this temple in a female form? Kindly tell me what is your real nature, male or female?"

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Sri Hanuman, worshipped as an Accompanying Deity

Hindu philosophy has highly symbolic means to signify subtle spiritual principles. The sub-human form of Sri Hanuman symbolises the human potential to realize the Divine Powers and Freedom by gaining mastery over the animal nature and instincts through devotion and knowledge. Sri Hanuman is depicted as a monkey who has acquired the super-human physical and spiritual powers and widsom through his one-pointed devotion to Sri Rama, the Supreme Reality. By worshipping Sri Hanuman many devotees are activating their spiritual power to overcome obstacles and for spiritual evolution.

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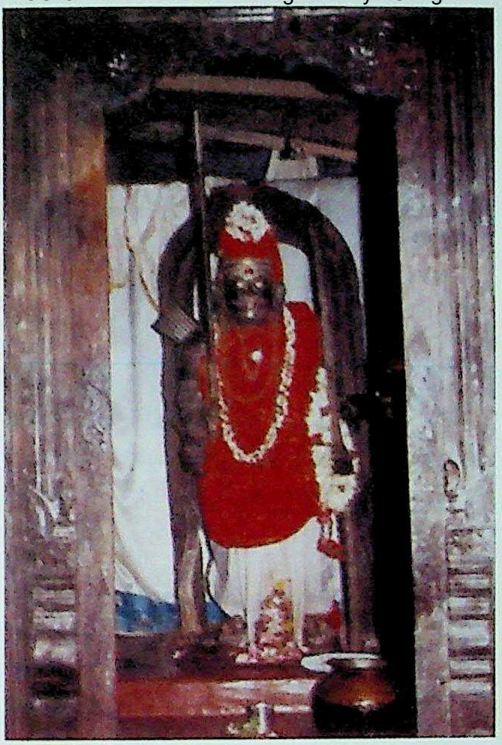

Sri Veerabhadra Swamy, the Divine Chieftain

While Sri Hanuman is represented as a devotee and an aspect of Lord Vishnu, Sri Veerabhadra Swamy, who is worshipped as the Chieftain of Divine Mother, depicts the tremendous power of Lord Shiva that shatters the negative forces and helps evolve human consciousness to its divine dimensions. The form of Lord Vishnu symbolizes the divine power that maintains the universe and Lord Shiva, the power that withdraws the universe into Reality. The glorious figure of Sri Mookambika represents the Eternal Source of all divine aspects. According to Hindu philosophy, all that appear as ephimeral are in essence nothing but the Eternal.

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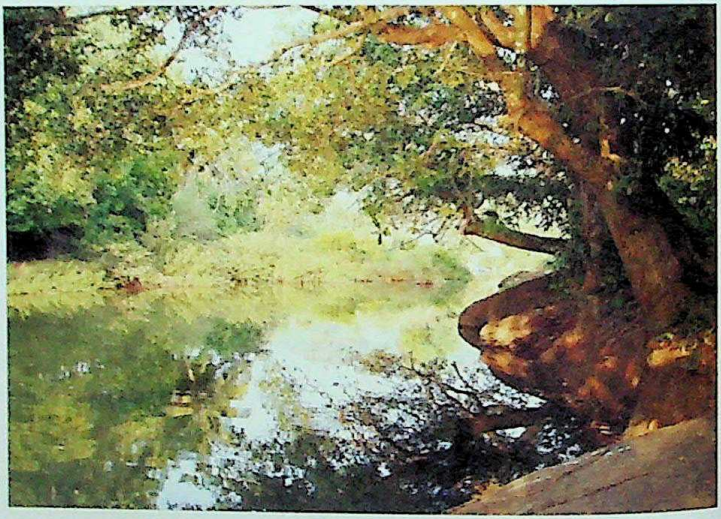
Ambaa-vanam - The Mother's Grove, the luxurient forests (Photo:C.V. Manoj)



A view of Souparnika river (Photo: Jurgen Berg)

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Sri Hari replies, "Listen O Indra, the male and female are eternal principles involved in the projection of the universe. Yet they are never separate. Fundamentally they are one, as gold and the ornaments made of it are one."

The pilgrim stands before the Divine Mother unloading the burdens of his/her life at Her Lotus Feet. He is in communion with the uncaused Cause of everything – the Mother Divine. He feels relaxed, elevated – the right mental atmosphere for the inner spiritual energies to wake up with their miraculous potential and give life a rejuvenating touch.

The Accompanyuing Deities

After prayers, while the pilgrim circumambulates the *sreekovil*, the inner shrine, he worships Lord Ganesha in a small shrine on the left side. On reaching the back of the *sreekovil* he pays homage to Sri Aadi Shankaraachaarya at the sacred spot where the philosopher-saint had meditated and had the ecstatic vision of the Universal Mother. This spot inside a room is known as *Sankara Simhaasanam.* With special permission one can enter this room.

Coming out of the central shrine, the pilgrim makes a round of it worshipping the *Parivaara Devata-s* – the accompanying Deities – in several shrines. First he worships Sri Veerabadra Swaamy (one of the terrific aspects of Lord Shiva) in a shrine at the north-east corner. At the south-east corner is the shrine of Lord Subrahmanya. By its side, facing the north, is the *Saraswathi Mandapam* with an open hall where artists, poets, writers, and others make offerings of their performances and

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works to Sri Mookambika who is *Kalaanidhi,* the supreme source of all arts. And towards the backside at south-west corner is the shrine of Praanalingeshwara, an aspect of Lord Shiva. At the left side of this shrine is located a shrine where Lord Shiva is worshipped as Sri Paartheshwara. (According to tradition it is at this spot where Kola Maharshi, the great sage, after whom the place came to be known as Kolapura – now Kollur – had meditated.) On the left of Sri Paartheshwara shrine is the temple of Sri Panchamukha Ganapathi – Lord Ganesha with five faces. Next to this are two shrines where Lord Shiva is worshipped as Chandramouleshwara and Nanjundeshwara, respectively. At the north-west corner is the shrine of Sri Hanuman and next to it is that of Lord Mahavishnu. At the north-east corner, on the right of Sri Veerabhadra's temple, is a small shrine of Sri Gopalakrishna.

Outside the wall surrounding the temple-complex, at the north-west corner, near the temple Guest House, is the shrine of Goddess Sri Chowdeshwari, who is the *Kshetra Paalini* – the guarding deity of the temple.

Thousands in the grip of problems have experienced the transforming Grace of the Divine Mother. Specific instances need not be mentioned here. They are innumerable. Every earnest devotee must have experienced it. She dwells in everyone with all Her infinite glories. When one invokes Her, miracles do happen, because nothing is impossible for the Divine Mother immanent in us with Her infinite potentials. Problems agitating the mind dissolve themselves. The realm of understanding expands, the realm of inner peace expands. Many a life has been thoroughly transformed in Sri Mookambika's Presence.

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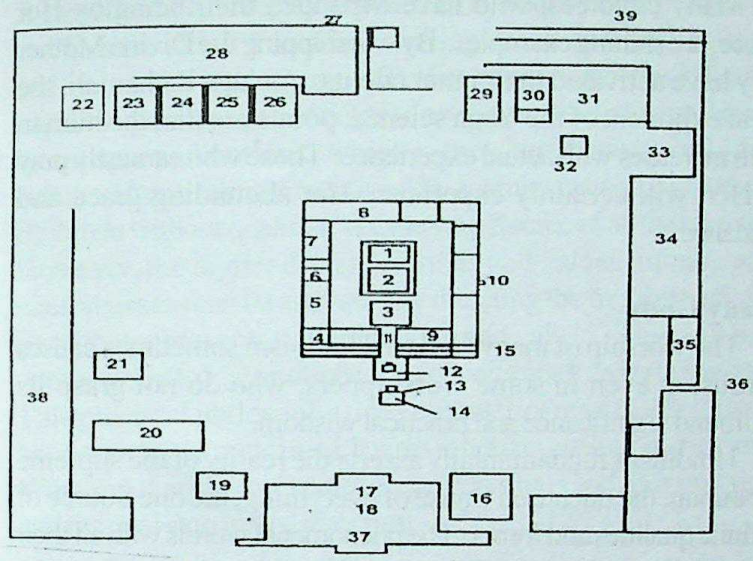

1. Sanctum Sanctorum (1 & 2. Garbhagriham and Lakshmi - mandapam) 3.Theerthamandapam 4. Puraanamandapam 5. Nivedya-shaala 6. Dasha-mukha Ganapathi 7. Place of Gana-homam 8. Aadi Shankara-peedam 9. Place for Tulaa-bhaaram 10. The norhtern entrance to the inner shrine 11. The eastern main entrance 12. Mahaa-peedam 13. Dhwaja-sthambham 14. Deepa sthambam 15. The seat of Kshetrapaala 16. Sri Veerabhadra Shrine 17. Mahaa-dwaaram 18. Mukha-mandapam 19. Sri Subrahmanya shrine 20. Saraswathi-mandapam 21. Keli pond 22. Sri Praana lingeshwara shrine 23. Sri Paartheshwaa shrine 24. Sri Pancha-mukha Ganapathi shrine 25. Sri Chandra Mouleeshwara shrine 26. Sri Nanjumdeshwara shrine 27. The western gate 28. Meditation Hall 29. Sri Aanjaneya shrine 30. Sri Vishnu shrine 31. Garden 32. The well 33. Ratham 34. The office counters 35. Office of the Executive officer 36. The northern entrance 37.The main eastern entrance 38.Yaagashaala 39.Sri Chowdeshwari shrine

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Many devotees, who have expanded their being by Her Grace, are shining examples. By worshipping the Divine Mother they have activated their inner talents. As sage Pathanjali, the great exponent of the Yoga science, points out that the human faith increases with actual experience. Those who earnestly pray to Her, will certainly experience Her abounding grace and guidance.

Many Gods

The worship of many Gods in Hinduism sometimes causes confusion even in some worshippers, who do not grasp its profound significance and practical wisdom.

Hinduism fundamentally asserts the reality of the supreme Brahman, the uncaused Cause of everything, the one Source of infinite qualities and forms. The phenomenal worlds with all their special dimensions, qualities and diversities emerge from the supreme power inherent in Brahman. It is from this basic standpoint Indian philosophy gives freedom for many forms of worship and worship of many Gods. The individual has the freedom to concentrate his mind on any elevating godly form as his *Ishta Devatha* , a personal aspect of Reality, dearest to his heart, with the understanding that every aspect is an aspect or *bhava* of the Supreme. Thus the Supreme, for example assumes *Krishna-bhava, Devee-bhava,* etc., according to the devotional mood of the worshipper. They are all one and the same. **Diversity signifies the freedom of expression of the One.** That is why in the *Vayu Puraana* it is said, "He who fanatically affirms the superiority of one Deity or *Avathaara* over another is a sinner".

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A Practical Philosophy of Human Freedom and Evolution

This freedom of spiritual striving based on a lofty concept and knowledge minimizes conflicts owing to diversities in human psychological trends and helps to evolve an all-inclusive, broad-based spiritual outlook, which is the characteristic of Indian culture. Human mind conditioned by qualities cannot comprehend Brahman without qualities, yet, the very Source of all the qualities. However, the higher divine qualities and values immanent in consciousness can be activated by directing the mind on a divine form that represents these qualities and values. This will help one to evolve to higher dimensions of consciousness and freedom. This practical philosophy does not restrict man to the stage of blind worship or static piety; it aims at human evolution to divinity. Worship of an *Ishta Devatha*, the Personal God, is a practical and rational step in this direction.

Personal God represents the higher aspects of Brahman and in the supreme sense, is Brahman Itself. As Jawaharlal Nehru says: "There appears to be a definite stopping place beyond which reason, as the mind is at present constituted, cannot go." How to go beyond it and evolve further, was the enquiry of India's sages. They evolved several methods. The worship of a Personal God is one of them, which employs a higher imaginative faculty as an aid for this breakthrough. This is a very scientific evolutionary method which requires steady practice.

In ordinary states, man tends to remain in his mundane reasoning, without cultivating the awareness of the higher facts of life, and the result is his over-indulgence in mind-narrowing

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selfishness, inviting suffering for himself and society. As one ordinarily regards a piece of stone only as an inert material, failing to recognize its immense nuclear potential, in ordinary reasoning one fails to perceive the evolutionary spiritual potentials latent in everyone.

Worship of the *Ishta Devatha* helps unfold the deeper spiritual dimensions, leading one, step by step to the freedom of higher knowledge and the Bliss of Supreme Existence. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa has shown us a great example of how one can through worship of Personal Gods who represent the higher spiritual aspects, ultimately attain the Supreme Consciousness. By worshipping a Personal God the devotee worships the Supreme Brahman Itself. With this understanding one can open one's heart to the divine power in any place of worship, benefitting from the special powers of the Supreme manifesting there as a Personal God. **There need be no conflict among different forms of worship or religions if this important point of the Hindu philosophy is clearly understood.** The Supreme assuming the very form and *bhava* (aspect) of the *Ishta Devatha* helps the devotee and leads him in his spiritual expansion. It is revealed in the Bhagavad-gita:

"In whatever way devotees approach ME, even so do I reach them and look after them."

Here 'ME' indicates the Supreme Brahman.

It is the Power – *Shakthi* – of Brahman that energises the idol and assumes the powers and aspects of a Deity in a temple, and radiating spiritual luster through the idol inspires the devotee to lift himself to the higher dimensions of spiritual life. An idol

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vibrant with spiritual power is basically a projection of the divine latent in man activated by his higher faculties of imagination and artistic talents. The idol expresses the divine, while the divine is unfathomably more than the idol. **The idol is a key to open the door to our immeasurable divinity, Freedom Supreme.**

When one totally surrenders to the Deity – that is, when one frees oneself from the oppressive limitations of the personal ego to draw upon the unlimited powers of the Higher Self – the Deity, as assured in the Bhagavad-gita, looks after him in all respects. The Divine Grace leads him forward.

The Deity in essence is Brahman. In many a hymn, a Deity is extolled as Brahman. In a famous hymn on Divine Mother Sri Mookambika in the *Skanda Purana,* the Mother is described thus: *"O Devi, Thou then engaged in the play of creation. As one engaging in creation, Thou art called Gauri and as the playful one Thou art called Kumari. Prostration to Thee O Mahaalakshi, Goddess of Kolapura."*

A visit to this great seat of active spiritual power is very propitious, *bhukthi mukthi pradaayakam* – bestowing worldly harmony and the freedom of spiritual life.

Open Yourself to Divine Action

When one enters a place of worship, the doors of the heart should be kept open. One should try to tune oneself to be receptive to the Divine Power to get the maximum benefit from the visit. One's sole aim should be the communion with the Spirit, the all-powerful transcendental Source of everyone and everything, the Power that guides and removes the obstacles on the path and lifts one to higher levels of consciousness. The vibrant spiritual powers in the temples gives one access to one's own

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divine dimensions. For this, the worshipper stands before the *sanctum sanctorum* for the action of the divine power, like a patient before a doctor, like a block of marble before the sculptor. He who cultivates this attitude expands himself by a visit to a place of worship. During such visits one should try to maintain a serene mind. (of course, the spiritual atmosphere in temples helps it) for communion with the Divine Power.

Sages discovered the places of active spiritual energy, or activated it by their special methods in some centres and bequeathed these treasures to us to use them wisely for our cultural and spiritual expansion. Their aim of thus helping the spiritual unfoldment of the human mind should not be narrowed down by degrading their purpose. **Temples should function as model spiritual centres of gentle and cordial behaviour where one is reminded of the equality of human beings, irrespective of power, position, wealth and other such transitory factors, before the Divine. Divine Mother is the Mother of all, of everything. In the Divine Presence none is more privileged than any one else.**

Sometimes, centres of spiritual power, after remaining in oblivion for a period, resurrect themselves manifesting a new graceful energy as if by a divine programming. The miraculous resurrection of Thuluvannur Sri Mahavishnu temple on the banks of the river Paalthirapuzha at Payyanur, Kerala, is a recent example for such a manifestation.

Many Systems and One Goal

Several systems of devotion, yoga practices, artistic and scientific pursuits help the total growth of man. Through these creative exercises of the brain and mind and one-pointed striving

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for higher ideals, man progresses towards his evolutionary goal – the expansion of consciousness. By worshipping the Deity - that is, by invoking the spiritual powers latent in him – he transcends his animality to rise to a superior humanhood. The *pooja-s*, rituals, festivals, etc., make this evolutionary process of invocation effective, colourful and joyous.

Work, Worship and Knowledge

Devotion without an earnest effort to achieve right intellectual understanding may degrade itself into self-righteous fanaticism and superstition. The ancient philosophical treatise *Soorya-gita* says, "Without knowledge one will not succeed in perfecting meditation; without fortifying one's inner life through meditation one cannot achieve perfection in work; without work and meditation one cannot achieve right knowledge. This trio - knowledge, meditation and work - help one another, and together lead man to peace, perfection and freedom. If one neglects one of these disciplines obeying the advice of wrong teachers, one cannot achieve liberation."

In the olden days temples were great centres where all these disciplines were promoted, as the great spiritual explorers of yore knew that faith without knowledge would not be conducive to harmonious inner development. Many arts - even martial arts - and sciences that help man in his physical, mental and spiritual evolution were perfected and studied in the vicinity of great temples.

Ancient Discoveries and Modern Science

The ancient explorers of India acquired faith in a Supreme Power, through bold reasoning and inquiry. They gained supreme wisdom pushing ahead stage-by-stage, searching, doubting,

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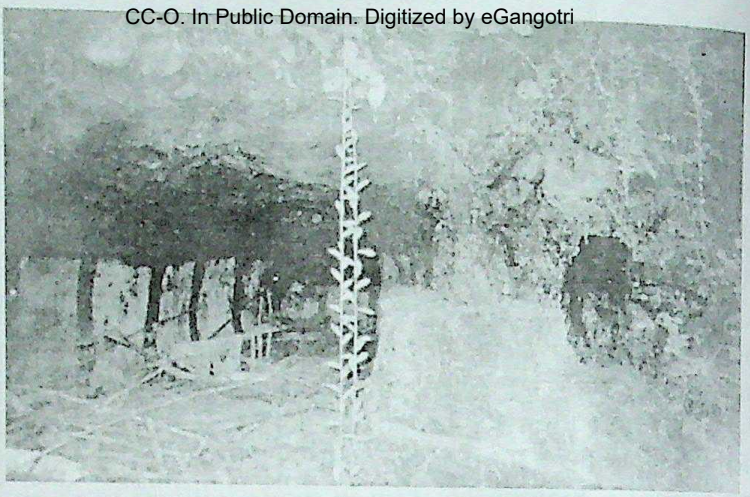

The cave Serpa Guha near Souparnika river (Photo: S.G. Padmanabhan)

learning, meditating and persevering till the intuitional faculties powerfully expressed in them, revealing to them the inner secrets of life and the universe.

Kundalini

Their inquiries form an ocean of knowledge, which if explored with an open mind, will supply valuable clues to modern explorers for greater discoveries on the existential secrets of human life and universe

They discovered the various subtle currents of energy in the body. (The ancient treatment by acupuncture, now revived in China, which is raising deeper questions for modern science to consider, and India's still subtler science of *Marma Vidya,* which was specially vogue in Kerala, now almost extinct, must have been rooted in this knowledge.) In recent times, modern

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physiology has also become aware of the electrical currents in nerve fibres.

The Rishi-s perceived the activity of a super intelligent energy medium, which they called *Praana*, in the visible and subtle functioning of the body. (They classified it into several types according to the special functions. What keeps the bodies of some Yogi-s undecayed for several days after demise, it is said, is because of the continuing presence of certain aspect of *Praana* called *Dhananjaya.*) The subtle creative energy of Brahman, according to the science of Yoga, is concentrated in the lowest part of the spinal column, the *Mooladhaara.* (It is remarkable that the cerebro-spinal system was a focus of attention centuries before modern physiology began probing it!) They called this energy concentration as the *Kundalini* – the coiled-up one – for, normally the major part of its great potentials remain in an inactive state. When *Kundalini* is activated, man evolves stage by stage to higher levels of consciousness, with the expression of higher talents and even acquiring the supernatural faculties known as *siddhi-s*, mentioned in the *Yoga Sutra-s* of Sage Pathanjali.

The sages discovered through their experiments that the full activation of Kundalini, the consciousness-expanding spiritual energy, would provide man the supreme spiritual wisdom expanding his being to the *turya* consciousness, which frees him from the grip of time and space and from the biological cycles of birth and death.

Spiritual Expansion

This energy wakes up through various means. Devoted concentration on a Personal Deity, who symbolizes ethical and spiritual values, is one among them. Even in people who have no

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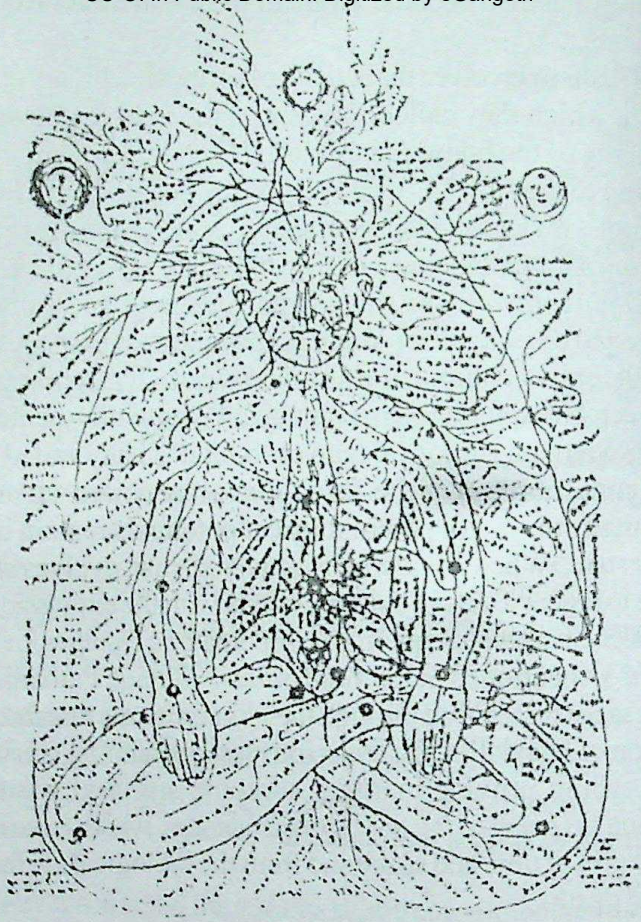

An old sketch based on the Yogic knowledge of the subtle channels of Praana, the bio-psychic energy currents. The major centres of energy activation called the Chankra-s, the main channels along the spinal column, the solar and lunar aspects of energy, the numerous sub-channels, the various power-spots in the body, etc., are marked. India's Marma Vidya, *the knowledge of vital spots, and*

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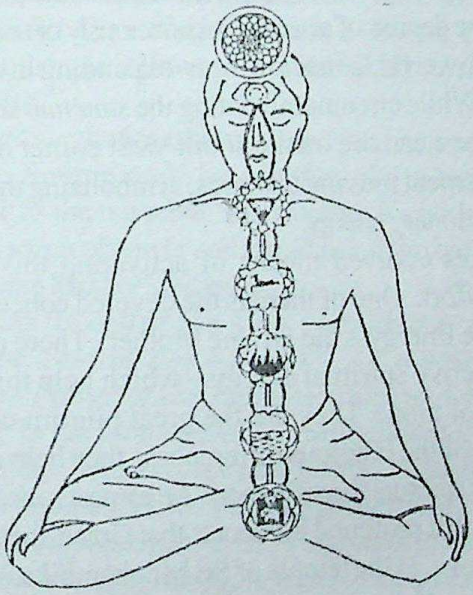
the acupuncture revived in China, are based on this knowledge of the subtle energy currents.

Indi's ancient explorers had a very deep knowledge of the human body, the mind and its great potentials. Issac Asimov in his book. **The human Brain** *writes, "The modern idea of the brain as the seat of thought and through the nerves the receiver of sensation and the initiator of motion was not definitely established untill the 18th centruty". It is thought-provoking that many centuries before that, the Rishi-s of India declared the brain as the potential seat of the supreme state of consciousness and they chalked out energy centres and channels of energy currents. It is remarkable that they gave prime importance to the cerebro-spinal system and regarded it as the basis of the future evolution of man".*

Deepening the knowledge of the inner nature of man is the most effective way to counteract the terribly materialistic trends of today that play havoc with human life and Nature. It is a synthesis of the ancient and modern explorations that is going to help the evolution of a superior human being and in this effort for transformation, India's ancient texts will prove to be a profound fund of illuminating knowledge.



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faith in the divine nature of life, Kundalini energy is roused by earnest dedication to an ideal or work; but when it is thus activated without acquiring spiritual wisdom through study, ethical living and inner search, man may not achieve a universal vision, which is the natural result of an expanded consciousness. In such a situation, his ego swells up and he tends to misuse his developed intellect and its talents, causing eventually misery to himself and others. Conscious effort for a harmonious intellectual and spiritual growth leads man to greatness and fulfillment in life.

Here the illuminating words of Bertrand Russel are very relevant: **"Unless men increase in wisdom as much as in knowledge, increase of knowledge will be an increase of sorrow."** The extraordinary talents seen in some people are the result of some degree of activation, consciously or unconsciously, of this all-powerful, consciousness-expanding divine energy, Kundalini. While circumambulating the *sanctum sanctorum* of the temple one can see on the south-west corner of the wall a figure of a serpent moving upwards, symbolizing the activation of this evolutionary energy.

The sages evolved means of activating this energy by conscious effort. One of them is the devoted concentration on the Supreme Energy – the Divine Mother. There are places – centers of active spiritual energy – which help this effort for spiritual evolution. They are the great pilgrim centres, and irrespective of the religious differences, they help activate the evolutionary spiritual forces in man. An earnest seeker invariably experiences that profound influence, that Grace, that experience of Devine Love, in the temple of Sri Mookambika.

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Srichakram

In the worship of Divine Mother, the renowned mystic design, Srichakram assumes much significance. We often tend to represent the Supreme Truth in symbolically modified human forms for the sake of a conceptual orientation. The Reality – Divine Mother – is at once formless and with infinite forms. Usually a symbolic female form is used to invoke the Mother Principle with infinite spiritual potentials.

How to symbolize the formless aspect of the One pregnant with infinite forms? Srichakram represents the formless One and the principles involved in Its manifestation as infinite forms. **The Mother is the Source of all forms. She is not separate from the universe but immanent in it. She is the invisible Source and the visible Manifestation.** This concept is well expressed in *Sri Devi Bhaagavatam,* a mystic epic on the Universal Mother, as follows: ***Whatever is, I am, the Eternal I, nothing else."***

Srichakram symbolizes the transcendental Supreme Truth as the supreme Source and the scheme of Its evolutionary manifestation as the universe. Its structure is considered to be holding great spiritual power and is traditionally used in worship to invoke Divine Mother's blessings.

Srichakram is called the king of chakra-s, the mystic designs. The central dot - Bindu - of the Srichakram represents the Power of the supreme transcendental Truth, Brahman. It is the inconceivable transcendental Source of infinite qualities, possibilities and forms. It is potent with the male and female (Shiva-Shakthi) principles, apparently opposite, yet complementary. It is the activation or these principles which causes the expression of the possibilities.

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The first polarization of these principles takes place by the primordial vibration in the central *Bindu* causing the activation of the Shiva (male) and Shakti (female) principles, while the Central Truth, the Divine Mother, represented by the *Bindu,* maintains Her transcendental all-encompassing Oneness.

The male (Shiva) principle is represented by the first triangle enclosing the *Bindu* with the apex pointing upwards, and the female (Shakti) principle, by the triangle pointing its apex downwards within the Shiva triangle. The one within the other indicates their fundamental unity amidst their apparent diversity. Subsequently, nine triangles arise, four pointing upwards (Shiva triangles) and five pointing downwards (Shakthi triangles). Their interlacing gives rise to forty three triangles. These indicate the various subtle principles involved in the evolution of the universe from the polarization and recombination of the male (conscious) and female (energy) principles immanent in the One Supreme Reality. This central area of the triangles of Srichakram thus symbolizes the subtler stages of evolution of the universal phenomena.

This portion of triangles is surrounded by two concentric circles of eight and sixteen lotus petals, respectively. These are in turn surrounded by three more concentric circles. Outside them is a square of three lines which opens out at the middle of each side as four portals. All these symbolize the various principles and stages involved in the evolutionary expansion and the emergence of the universe, the final square portion indicating the formation of the material dimension. The open portals symbolise the limitlessness of the emerging universe from the limitless Reality.

Srichakram symbolises the plan of evolution of the universal phenomena through the polarization of the two aspects of the

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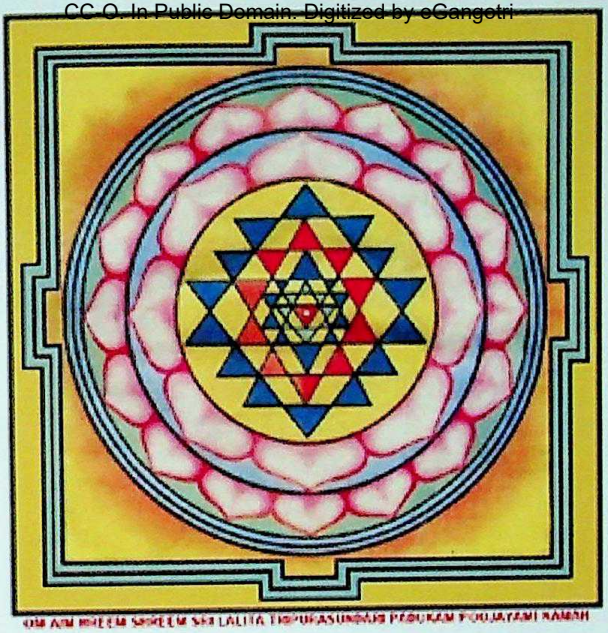

The central dot of Srichakram represents the innermost ageless, timeless Reality in every one - the Divine Mother

One, represented by Lord Shiva (Consciousness) and Goddess Sakthi (Energy) and the different stages of their intermingling. Meanwhile, it also points the way of spiritual expansion of man and his liberation. The powers symoblised as Goddesses with specialized powers and aspects as the presiding deities in the various stages of Srichakram represent the higher levels and aspects of consciousness. The theme of Srichakram suggests that man can expand himself to Universal Consciousness through a broad-based and intelligent spiritual practice.

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Saraswathy Mandapam

Srichakram forms a very exhaustive subject. A detailed study of the subject is not in the scope of this book. Instead of dissipating the evolutionary energy in retrogressive occupations as the arms race, religious and ethnic fanaticism and rivalries, if mankind makes a serious effort to expand the horizon of knowledge from all available sources, ancient and modern, the integrated knowledge would lead to a super human civilization.

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The Legend and Its Message

THE SKANDA PURANA tells us the ancient lore about the origin of the temple. Long, long ago the place was known as Maharanyapuram. It was then the abode of many ascetics including a great Yogi, Kola Maharshi, who did penance there for many years for the welfare of humanity. Lord Shiva appeared to the sage and advised him to worship Paraa-shakthi, the supreme Divine Power in that sacred place. Eventually a *Jyothirlingam* – now seen in front of the form of Divine Mother – was self-born there. The Lord installed in the *Jyothirlingam* the powerful mystic symbol, Srichakram.

Lord Shiva advised the sage to worship the *Jyothirlingam* and told him that Paraa-shakthi would appear in that sacred place in due course in the form of Mahaalakshmi, and the sacred *Jyothirlingam* would always be dynamic with Her presence. This place, Maharanyapuram, later came to be known as Kolapuram after the great sage. The present name Kollur is its modern form.

The Demon of Darkness

Now, a demon called Kamhaasura, who had acquired tremendous power by worshipping Paraa-shakthi as Kaala Bhairavi through severe penance, began terrorizing the three worlds. Demoniac characters will get inexorably egoistic once they get powers and will forget the supreme Source of all powers. He conquered the three worlds striking havoc everywhere.

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Thereupon, Paraa-shakthi assumed the form of Tripurasundari to destroy him. Kamhaasura escaped to the Rishyamooka mountain and began performing intense austerities there in order to propitiate Lord Shiva for the boon of immortality.

The gods came to Kolapuram and along with Kola Maharshi worshipped Paraa-shakthi in the form of the all-powerful Devi and sought Her intervention to protect the worlds from the terrible consequence of Kamhaasura attaining immortality. Devi thereupon cursed Kamhaasura rendering him dumb *(mooka)*. Thus he was unable to ask for the boon. Kamhaasura now came to be known as Mookaasura. **(These are highly symbolic stories on the stages of struggle between the trends of retrogression and the forces of evolutionary expansion in man.)**

His plan having failed, Mookaasura with doubly renewed rage began to spell destruction. Devi appeared accompanied by Her many divine forces, and in a terrible battle the demon was beheaded. **Mookaasura thus attained supreme liberation, for when the evil nature in one is destroyed by divine action one verily becomes divine, as fundamentally everything is divine only.** Therefore, *pooja* is performed in the temple in honour of Mookaasura also, who despite his demoniac nature ultimately attained his fundamental divinity.

Darkness Realises the Glory of Light

In the last stage of his battle with Divine Mother, the demon Mookaasura realized that the darkness of evil, however powerful

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it might become, would have to bow down at last before the might of Light. He repented and prayed to the Divine Mother to bless that place with Her graceful presence in order to harmonise the lives of generations by dispelling darkness from their hearts. The gods and Rish-s also implored Her so, and accordingly, after the destruction of Mookaasura, the Divine Mother, with all Her accompanying forces, disappeared in the *Bindu* of the mystic Srichakram of the *Jyothirlingam* worshipped in the temple.

The Message of the Legend

Most of the legends in Indian mythology have profound messages to convey. The Divine Mother, the slayer of Mookaasura, is called Mookaambika – the Mother who destroyed the demon of dumbness. **Mookaasura literally means the Demon of Dumbness. The demon lives in human beings in varied stages of manifestation. Man is often selfishly mute to the sufferings of his fellow beings. This unsympathetic, mute personality in him has a demoniac retrogressive urge to dominate, oppress and exploit others to further his selfishness.** But he has in him the evolutionary godly forces that urge him to overcome his selfishness and grow to greater heights. These two opposing traits are in a constant struggle. It is by the conscious invocation of the universal spiritual values inherent in him – symbolized by Devi and Her helpers – he vanquishes the pain-giving demon of this insensitivity and dullness and evolves to the universality and freedom of his divinity. The Divine Mother when invoked, removes the inertia of dullness in man and leads him to an awareness of the supreme knowledge of his Immortal Being, as longed in the Vedic prayer, *'Mrithyor*

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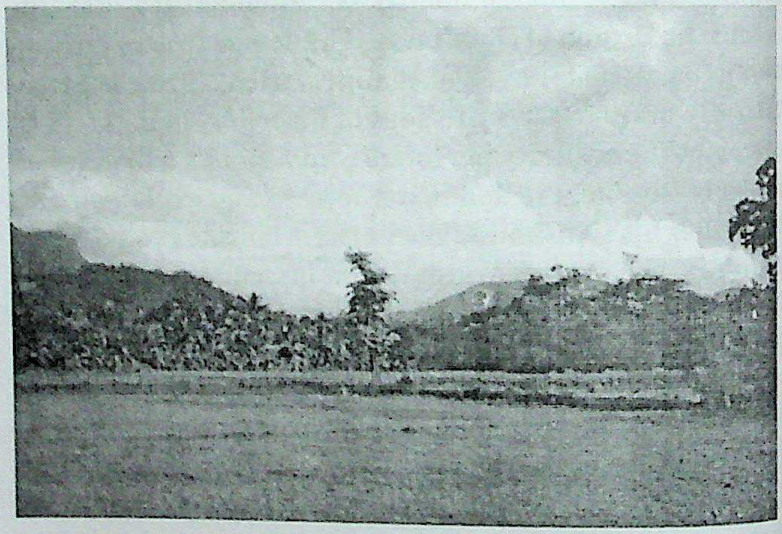
maa amritham gamaya'- 'Lead me from death to Immortality'.

This symbolism of slaying the demon in man is well revealed in the following prayer to Sri. Mookambika in the *Skanda Puraanam,* **"O Divine Mother, those who lack intelligence and power of expression invoke Thee, and Thou uplift them bestowing talents and spiritual wisdom. Therefore, Thou art known as Mookambika. Prostrations to Thee, O Mahaalakshmi, Goddess of Kolaapura."** It is no wonder that artists, musicians, writers and people in the grip of problems that obstruct the smooth flow of life, earnestly seek Her Grace. The shrine is vibrant with that most compassionate Divine Love immanent in Nature which expresses in all beings as the motherly



A Kollur scenery. (Photo: S.G. Padmanabhan)

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consideration for the offspring. Basically love is an awareness of the unity of all in the oneness of Universal Intelligence, despite the separate states of bodily existence. Ordinarily this sublime sense is coloured and clouded in various degrees by the mental conditioning and circumstances. This sense of oneness is predominantly present in motherly love. The sense of wellbeing we usually experience in the presence of the spiritually evolved ones is the result of the emanation of universal love that transcends the limitations of individuality. An earnest pilgrim experiences this exalted sense of wellbeing bestowed by this closeness to the Divine in the presence of Mother Mookambika.

The Cause of Evil

The message of the legend reveals that the human mind, despite its inherent divine powers and faculties, tends to misuse its relative freedom of choice and assumes a demoniac character by developing self-oppressive pride, egoism and greed. The divine is the ultimate source of all power. But man's inflated ego tends to misuse the power he has. He becomes irrational, forgets the Supreme Source and deflects from the path of his natural evolution to a higher stature. This is the cause of evil. The dull, swelled up ego, Mookaasura, with all the forces he can muster, will resist and put up a fight against man's evolutionary journey to divinity. The struggle between the self-contracting forces of egoistic selfishness and the spiritual values which expand him to his fellow beings and finally to the eternity of Existence, intensifies. Mookaasura, the demon of dullness and ignorance, though powerful, has to give way, and man is destined to evolve and gain the freedom of divinity. Why should he delay his destined

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freedom? He should send the *deva-s* in him (activate the spiritual values in him) to invoke the Mother Divine and seek Her intervention in the struggle. Even a little thrust in spiritual expansion, as the Bhagavad-gita assures, liberates one from great fear. He becomes aware of the Source of everything. As this awareness intensifies, he experiences the expanding realm of freedom within. His mind expands to embrace a universal dimension finding a new meaning in life and its destiny.

The legend proclaims that the forces of goodness would ultimately vanquish the evil. That is progress. In human life and in the long history of the world this is a proven fact. That which is higher is destined to triumph over the lower.

The Divine Grace

In the days of yore, kings and commoners alike crossed all the hazardous terrains and unbridged rivers to seek the Grace of Sri Mookambika. Today the journey is much easier with bridges spanning the broad rivers and with calm, zig zag roads bordered with evergreen jungles. Every earnest devotee will have something to say about the Grace received. In case of some, it may be a miraculous incident, in some, a gradual transformation for the better. The earnest receive a new, refreshing strength, the divine help.

From the unknown past, centuries after centuries, this holy place has been a centre of worship, perhaps with widely varying modes following different customs. Tradition has it that the present form of rituals and *pooja-s* were prescribed by Sri Aadi Shankaraachaarya. According to some historical records, the

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temple was reconstructed in the present form in 1140 A.D. by Venganna Samanthar of the Binki royal family of Halkal in Karnataka.

Queen Chennnamma, the heroic queen of the Keladi kingdom of Karnataka, who gave asylum to Prince Raja Ram, son of Chattrapati Shivaji and dealt a crushing blow to the invading armies of emperor Aurangazeb, driving them back out of her mountain kingdom, was an earnest devotee of Sri Mookambika. She always felt the protective hand of the Mother.

A beautiful fact about God is that every earnest devotee finds the Lord closest to him/her as a companion, a protector. This is the fact which is so delicately and romantically signified in the *raasa kreeda* – Krishna's Dance of Love with the Gopi-s in the *Srimad Bhaagavatha.* Every Gopi feels that Krishna is with her, feels Him exclusively her own. But there is a danger that even devotion may sometimes degenerate into a sort of egoistic self-glorification. This makes one self-centred causing obstacles in spiritual progress. To guard the Gopi-s from such a situation, Krishna gives them pain by spontaneously disappearing from their midst. They should be made aware of His transcendental nature even as they take Him as an individual dearest to their heart. The pangs of separation sent them in search of Krishna everywhere. They ask the trees, animals, stones and everyithing else about the whereabouts of Krishna. And in such an earnest seeking, when they forget their limited selves, so absorbed in Krishna, the Krishna Consciousness dawns in them with the most pleasant revelation that everything is nothing but Krishna Himself. In such an ecstatic state they realize that they had never lost

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Krishna and they themselves are Krishna Himself in their core. Then the Lord returns to them in His eternal glory and embraces them – an enchanting beautiful story of the pilgrimage of the apparently fragmented individual to find his identity with the Unlimited Supreme.

Pooja-s

The temple opens early morning at 5 a.m. One experiences an unforgettable sense of sublime peace at the time of *nirmaalyam,* the re-decoration of the idol with flower garlands in the early hours. Then follows the *dantadhaavana pooja* and *udayakaala pooja*.After the *sribali pradakshinam*, the processional circumambulation carrying a small icon of the Deity, the devotees are given a nectarine *prasaadam*, Gudu-shaanti.

The *pooja* of the noon begins at 11 a.m and at about 1p.m. the *mangalaarathi* is performed. After *sribali pradakshinam*, the inner shrine is closed till 3 p.m.

The *pradosha pooja* takes place at 7 p.m. It is a great occasion of devotional fervour. All the major *pooja-s* are conducted in the shrine of Sri Veerabhadra also, just after their performance in the inner shrine. After the *sribali pradakshinam*, the small icon which is taken out on such occasions is brought to the hall, Saraswathi Mandapam where takes place *mangalaarathi* and *ashtavaadhana seva.* Then the icon is taken back to the inner shrine. After the *pooja*, a sacred concoction, *kashaaya-theertham,* is distributed to the devotees. It is a preparation of ginger, pepper, cardamom, tipali, lavangam, jaggari, etc., and is believed to have been introduced by Sri Aadi

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Shankarachaarya as a *prasaadam* having a special medicinal value. The shrine closes at 9 p.m. Sri Chandikaa Homam is an important offering here.

Festival

The main festival in the temple is the ***Rathothsavam***, the car festival, in the month of Phalguna (March-April). On the day of the Uthram star in the bright half of the month, the temple flag is hoisted and the car festival continues from that day to the day of the Moolam star – for nine days.

On the bright half of the Jyesta month (June-July) in the *Ashtami* day there is a special festival, as it is considered the day of the appearance of the Goddess. Special *pooja-s* are performed in the days of *Mahaalakshmi Vratham, Mahaa Shivaraatri, Sri Krishna Jayanthi, Vinayaka Chaturthi, Jyesta Lakshmi Vratham,* etc.

The ***Navaraathri***, the nine nights in the autumn (September-October), is a very auspicious occasion when thousands visit the temple. The special rites during this period are the *Navaakshari-Kalasam*, the *Chandikaa-homam,* the *Rathothsavam,* the *Purnakumbha-abhishekam,* etc.

There is a very colourful festival *Vana-bhojanam*, in November – December, when during night the festival icon of Devi is carried by a decorated and colourfully illuminated country craft across the Souparnika and offered worship in the forest. There is a feast for all on the next day at the river bank amidst the forest scenes.

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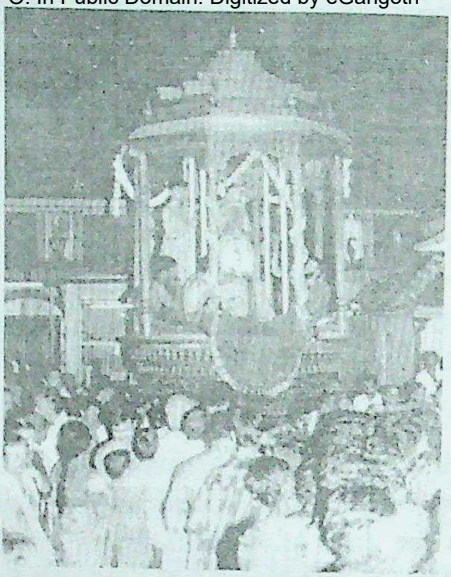

Festivals Herald a New Hope

Today man is in the grip of anxiety about his own future – an unparalleld juncture in history. Disharmony is depriving him the joy he can derive from the beauty of Nature and from his artistic and spiritual being. He has to conquer his self-destroying negativity by imbibing the festive spirit of Nature for his very survival.

Surrounded by the majestic mountains and the blooming forests with varied hues and fragrance, the shrine of Sri Mookambika invokes the springs of beauty in the human heart filling it with a joy divine. Thousands join the *Rathothsavam*, by drawing the great chariot of the Divine Mother, symbolizing the need of a joint effort of mankind to bring about a new civilization based on a higher spiritual vision of life.

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Rathotsavam, the colourful car festival (Photos: Srikant)

The ceremonious return after the holy dip in Souparnika.

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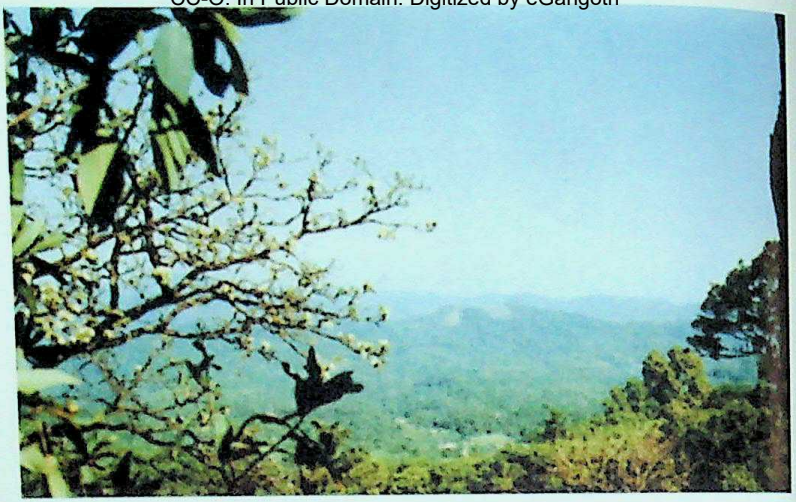

The flower offerings of the forest trees

The auspicious Vidyaarambham - The thantri priest Initiating a child into Knowledge

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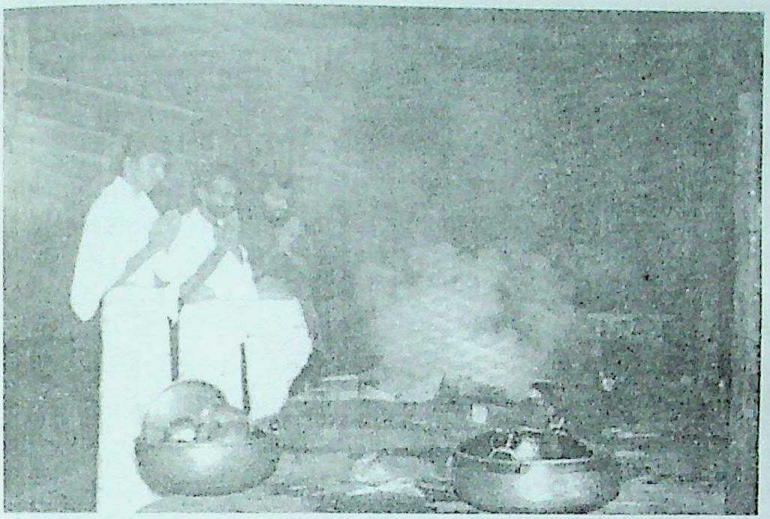

Devotees worshipping during Chandikaa-homam

The temple festivals suggest that man should make this inner depths a great center of festivity, of the joy of Self discovery.

What is the way?

He has to make his mind a pit of *yajna* fire of selfless work. He has to offer the negativity of his selfishness in that fire.

From that fire will manifest the Divine Mother, the all-loving Supreme, who allays all fears, who makes man the Man Divine.

How well ***Sri Lalithaa Sahasranaama-stothram,*** the powerful hymn of 1000 sacred Names of Divine Mother, describes this manifestation.

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Chidaghni-kunda sambhoothaa
Devakaarya samudyathaa

"Prostrations to Thee, who manifests in the *yajna* fire pit of Consciousness, who helps fulfil the Goal Divine!"– the goal of the evolution of the superman of Divine Freedom, when the human heart turns into a scene of festivity. The temple festivals remind man of this destined possibility.

Miraculous Cures and Devotional Disciplines

There have been numerous cases of healing and elimination of misfortunes after the afflicted had undergone a period of strict spiritual disciplines in temples. These disciplines make one receptive to the divine power within and in the universe. Jonne Donne has rightly said that man is not an island. He is subtly connected with the whole mankind and the universe. His spiritual disciplines move the higher powers of Nature to solve his problems, sometimes as if by a miracle. There are many personal experiences of those who have come in communion with the Power in Temples.

The ancient hymns like *Sri Vishnu-sahasranaama-sthothram*, *Sri Lalithaa-sahasranaama-sthothram*, *Soundarya-lahari*, etc., with their powerful suggestions invoke the potentials of our divine depths. When repeated, these spiritual formulae activate our higher potentials. They survived the test of time because of the experience of their benign effects by many a generation

- From the book: ***Power in Temples: A Modern Perspective***, by the same author.

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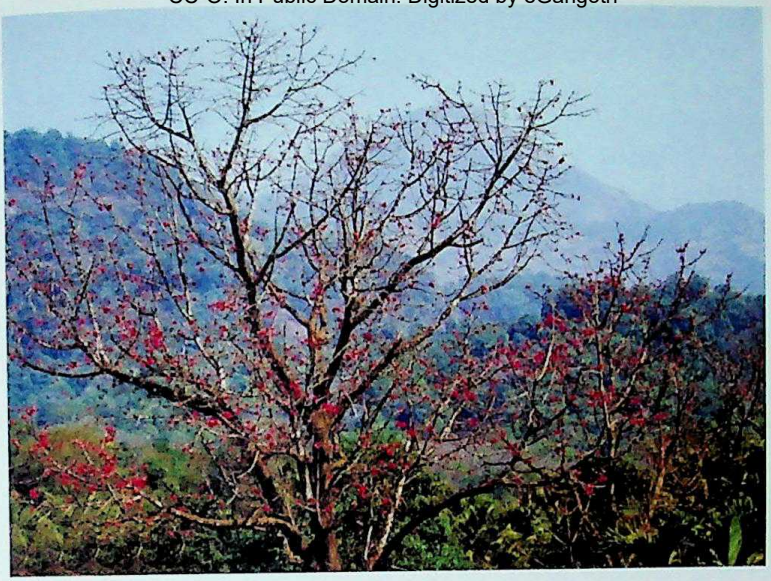

The Holy Places Around

THE ENTIRE ENVIRONMENT of the temple makes an impact on the visitor by its holy aura and natural beauty. Many a cave in the forests, hand-hewn and natural, suggest that the place must have been a *tapo-bhoomi*, a land of austerities and meditation from ancient times. There must have flourished great civilizations as revealed by the scattered huge bricks, granite blocks, and the relics of buildings. Civilizations rose and fell, while the great centre of worship survived the onslaught of time giving spiritual solace and insight to many a generation.

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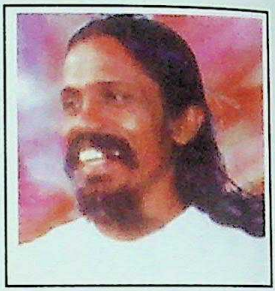
Dharma Peedam

About two kms away towards the north of Sri Mookambika Temple, on the way to Kudajaadri, is the Dharma Peedam nestled in a spacious landscape of natural beauty surrounded by lofty mountain ranges. Dharma Peedam is a centre for spiritual practice established here by the Tapovarishtashramam of Vandithavalam in Palakkad district in Kerala. The Spiritual Head of Tapovarishtashramam is Sri Thathathan, an enlightened soul who gives solace and guidance to people, conveying his teaching of spiritual unfoldment through a purposeful social consciousness - the world and life, he tells, are neither reality nor illusion but a purposeful flow towards the Divine Reality. The integral philosophy of Sri Thathathan inspires many people who visit the calm and spiritually vibrant place.



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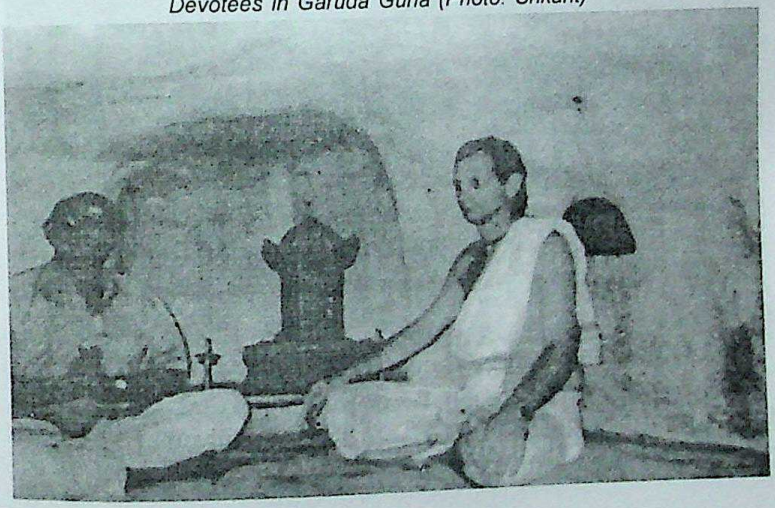
Cool, Serene, Souparnika

The river Souparnika meandering through serene jungles is as beautiful as its name itself. Some literary works, many a house and cultural organization bear the delightful name of this holy river. Several fine springs – among them are 64 holy *theertha-s* – originate from Kudajaadri and join to form two rivulets called the Kaashi-theertham and the Vahni-theertham. Their confluence takes place at a spot north-west of the temple to form the sacred Souparnika. Bathing in Souparnika is invigorating to the body and mind.

The legend has it that Garuda, the eagle-mount of Lord Vishnu performed austerities worshipping the Divine Mother, on the banks of the sacred river. Garuda is also known as Suparna, and it is from this word the river derived its charming name, Souparnika. On the eastern rocky slope of the river, under the spreading forest trees, there is a cave, Garuda Guha.

Devotees in Garuda Guha (Photo: Srikant)



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Many legends in India's philosophical texts have in-depth meaning. The word Vishnu means, ***Vyaa veshti iti Vishnu,*** *"that which is the all-prevading is Vishnu"- the changeless Reality, the basis of the aparently changing phenomena of the universe. The colour of Vishnu's body is light blue - the blue of the infinite space. Vishnu is the Supreme Soul - the Cosmic Intelligence - Whose body is* **gangana sadrisam** *- space-like, the space which Einstein says looks suspicious because everything originates from it, is maintained by it and dissolves into it! The eagle constantly floats in this mysterious unchanging space and is a good symbol to represent the creative motion originating in space that gives rise to the phenomenon of the universe. The very basis of matter and time is motion. Behind this creative motions is the unchanging Reality - symbolically, Lord Vishnu rides on His constantly moving eagle-mount, Garuda! The supreme power of that changeless Reality is Paraashakthi, the Mother Divine. All the subtle and gross motions of the universe derive their power from that Supreme Source. Garuda - the motion in space - the mount of Lord Vishnu - is constantly meditating on the Source of all power, the Divine Mother.*

The Legendary Shukla-theertham and Maasthikatte

A pleasant walk of about two kilometers eastward from the temple through the main road, bordered by jungles, takes the pilgrim to Shukla-theertham. There is a small shrine of Lord

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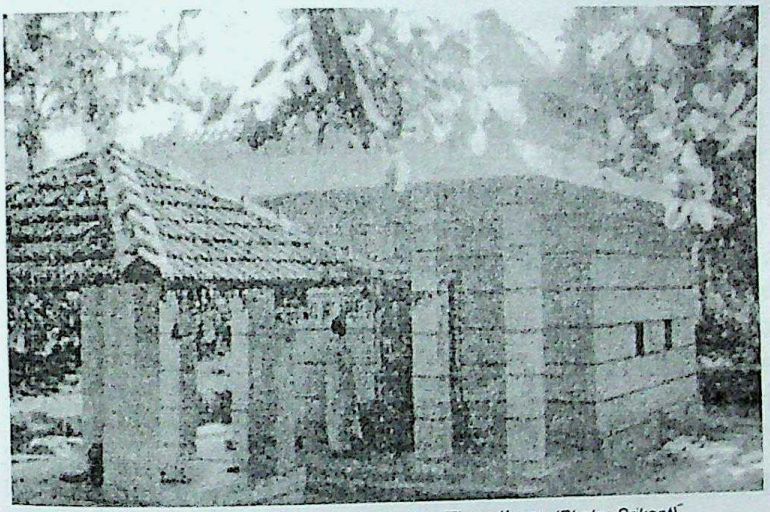
Siddeshwara, believed to have been founded by the ancient sage Shukraachaarya. About a kilometer from here is the Maasthikatte, where the guardian deities of the forests are worshipped. (see page 6)

Treat nature with reverence, maintain its freshness and live in harmony with it – this is the message of Maasthikatte.

Sri Krishna Temple and Madhu Theertham

At the south-east corner outside the temple complex, there is a Ganesha temple. A path from here towards the south leads to a small temple with an enchanting idol of Sri Krishna. From here a short walk into the forests takes one to a holy spot, Madhu theertham.



Sri Siddeshwara temple at Shukla Theertham (Photo: Srikant)

Exhilarating Pilgrimage to Kudajaadri and Chitramoola

The sublime heights of the Kudajaadri peak invites all lovers of Nature. From its top, the pilgrim witnesses God's boundless

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glory in the beauty of Nature. It is a place rich in historical importance and mystic significance.

From ancient days, this distinctive 1400–meter high peak has been a well known landmark for sailors, as it is visible from a great distance. It is a situated 13.51 'N and 74.52 'E. On the very mountain top there is a small shrine-like structure made of granite blocks. This is commonly known as Shankara Peedam and is believed to have been built at the place where Sri Aadi Shankaraachaarya sat absorbed in meditation.

From Kollur one can reach the top of Kudajaadri by a 25 km journey – 13 kms by bus, about 8 kms by a trek through forest paths and about 4 kms of steep climb. Better catch an early bus. After a half an hour journey, getting down at Karankatte, the three-hour walk before the sun gets hot, will be pleasant. With an occasional glimpse of a darting animal, listening the chirp of a variety of birds, breathing the fresh air laden with the aroma of medicinal herbs and forest flowers, the journey is very refreshing. Although this three-hour journey involves some arduous climbs, it is a thrilling experience, providing a healthy discipline for the body and mind. After about 8 kms of rather an easy walk through the jungles, just before reaching the steep mountain tracts, there is a center of ISKCON and Sri Krishna temple amidst beautiful natural settings. A little away there is also a tea stall. Up to this point visitors can go by a sturdy car or jeep. Taking along some fruits and water will add to the pleasantness of this refreshing forest trek.

Two Temples

Some improvements have been make recently by widening the path and with steps of rugged forest stones at points of hard climb, rendering the pilgrimage less hazardous. *Making further improvements may spoil the purpose of the pilgrimage*. Take

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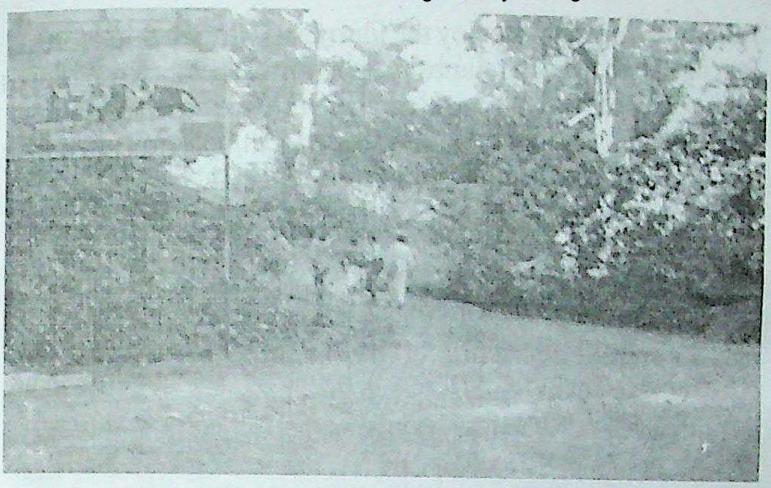
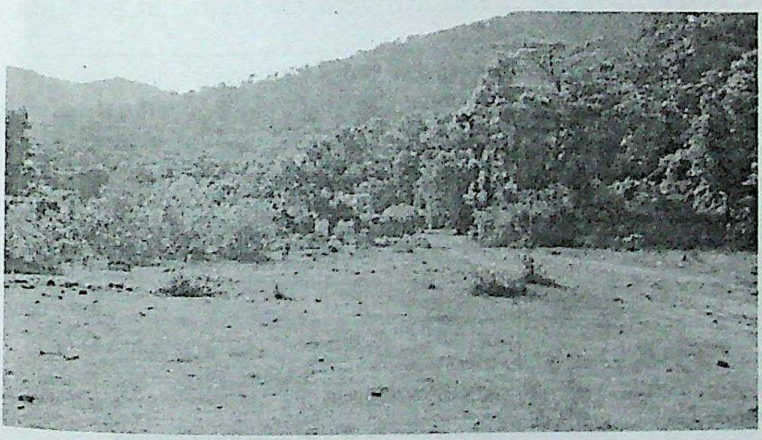


Karankatta, where the pilgrims to Kudajaadri alight from the bus. (photo: Srikant)

The plain lands on the mountains end here. Now the climb begins. At this place there is a small tea shop (photo: Srikant)



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minimum luggage to enjoy the journey. Through thick forests, braving the challenging climbs, the pilgrim reaches the lower slopes of the peak of Kudajaadri. Here there are two small shrines.

In the first shrines the Goddess is worshipped in Her terrific aspect and here meat is often offered in rituals. There is a rectangular iron pillar, about 7 meters high in front of the temple. It challenges time and weather like the famous iron pillar in Delhi. The pillar also poses a question to our usual concepts of the technological know-how of the ancients.

The well-known explorer of ancient mysteries von Erich Daniken tells in his book *The Gold of Gods* about a rectangular iron pillar, locally called the 'Iron Man' at Kottenforest near Bonn in Germany. He says that it has been there from 'time immemorial', surprisingly with no trace of rust, like the famous Iron Pillar of Delhi, a round massive column. The photograph of the rectangular iron pillar in Germany has much resemblance to the iron pillar in the remote mountain fastness of Kudajaadri. Both are rectangular and rust proof! Daniken says that according to the magnetic resistance measurement conducted, the 'Iron

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Top: Pilgrims on reaching a grassland on a mountain side surevy the further rolling heights to be climbed. In between the four stages of the mountain climb through the ever-fresh, lush green forests to reach two small shrines of Divine Mother there are bits of plain land for respite. The two shines and a travellers' bungalow are in between the two peaks on the left. From there a path towards the right takes the pilgrim to the very top of Kudajaadri.

Below: The temple complex. At the far left corner is the Kaala Bhairava temple with the iron pillar. At the right is the temple of Uma with the pond Kamandalu-theertham below. The house of the priest of Uma temple is at the near left corner. The path from the Uma temple seen towards the right leads to a traveller's bungalow.

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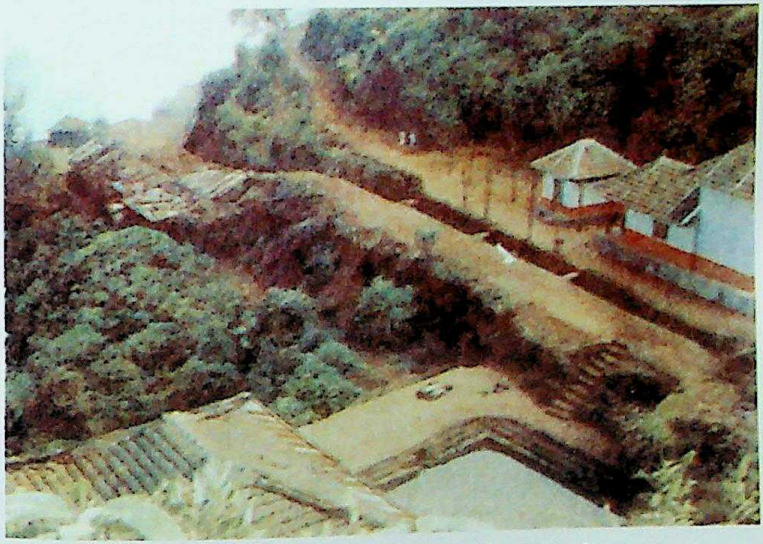
Reaching to the heights (Photo: Srikant)



The temple complex on the top (Photo: Jurgen Berg)

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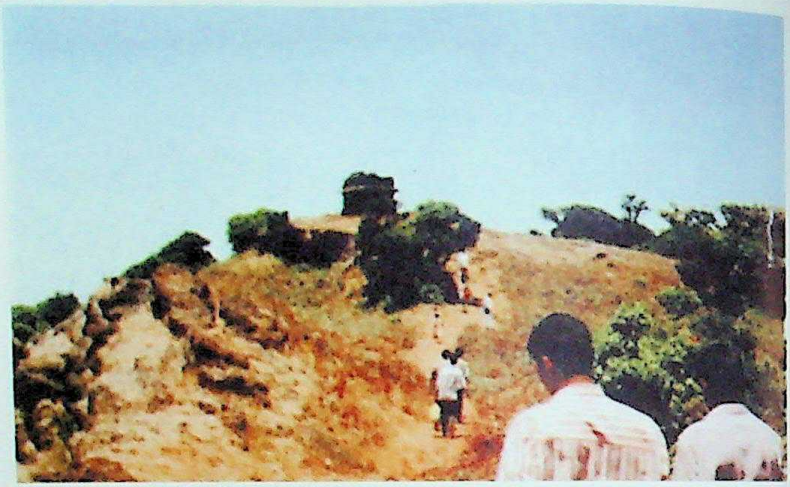

Kudajaadri peak with Shankara Peedam (Photo: Srikant)

Golden dawn at Kudajaadri (Photo: Srikant)

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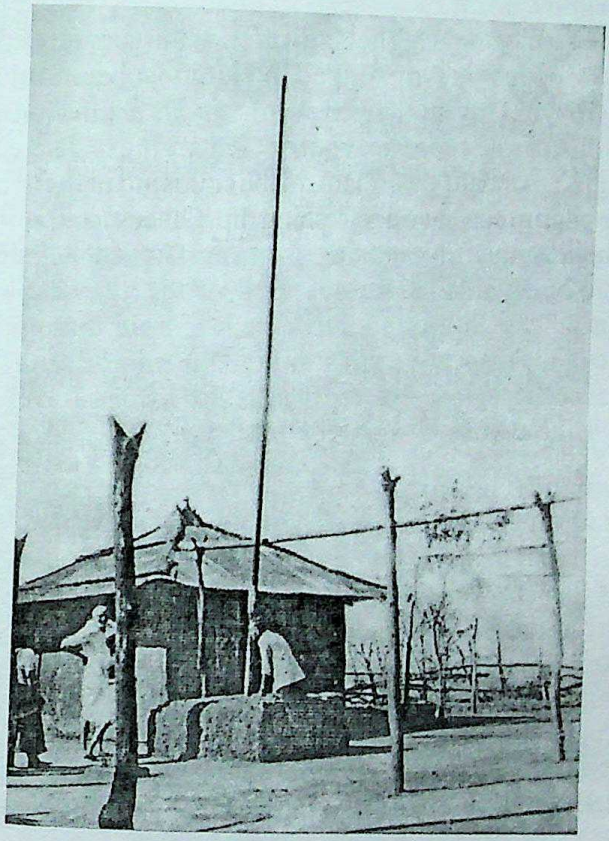
Photos on the opposite page

Top: *The top of Kudajaadri with the Shankara Peedam on the pinnacle built at the place believed to be the spot where Aadi Shankarachaarya sat in beatific union with the Supreme.*

Below: *The golden dawn at the top. The earth turns to be a milky ocean with the mountain tops projecting Islands in an endless sea of white line clouds.*

The temple of Kaala Bhairava with the rust-proof iron pillar
(Photo: R. Srinivasan)



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Man' is found to be sticking some ninety feet deep into the ground. It is said that a Maharaja of Mysore dug the ground around the Kudajaadri pillar to find its other end, but withdrew with awesome reverence seeing it apparently endless!

If rust-proof iron pillars have been existing from the remote past in Germany, Delhi and Kudajaadri, are not these strange relics pointers to some advanced world civilization about which we do not know much?

A little further, on a higher elevation is the second temple where the Goddess is worshipped in Her most beautiful and merciful from as Uma and where Vedic rituals are performed. Around this temple there are four sacred springs. There is a small pond Kamandalu-theertham on the courtyard of the temple where the pilgrim can have a refreshing dip. Other sacred springs are Sanghu-theertham, Naaga-theertham and Gauree-theertham. From here one gets a marvelous view of the awe-inspiring mountain ranges all around. Near each temple there is the residence of the respective priest, where the pilgrims may get accommodation and food. Nearby there is also a small Travellers' Bugalow in this mountain fastness.

The Ganapathi Guha

For a further climb to the peak there are two paths. The right-hand path is little shorter, reaching the cave Ganapathi Guha through Agasthya-theertham, and from there proceeding to the top. By taking the left-hand route, the traditional way, one moves through somewhat narrow ridges by the side of perpendicularly descending gorges of about 1400 metres deep, with the thick impenetrable forests of tall trees of the Ambaavanam, the Mother's Gardens, far below, appearing almost like a grass meadow! By going through the traditional way and returning via

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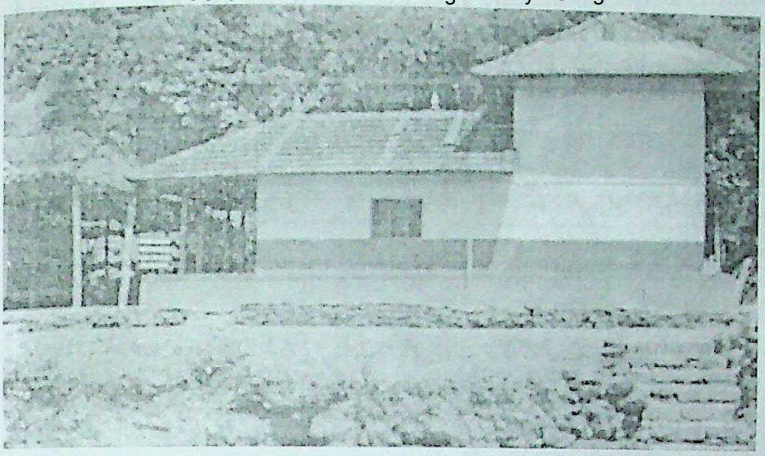

The temple of Divine Mother Uma in the shades of dark thick forests
(Photo: Srikant)

The pilgrimage is symbolic of man's spiritual unfoldment surpassing many a restrictive obstacle. (Photo: Jurgen Berg)

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Agastya-theertham one gets the exerience of both. Around Agastya-theertham there are mountain cascades, where one can have a cool bath. There are relics of ancient hermitages in this place.

While making some headway through the left-hand route one comes by a diversion towards the right which leads to the cave Ganapathi Guha. Ganapathi Guha is indeed a very mysterious cave. Inside it there is an ancient and graceful stone idol of Sri Ganesha. The cave-top slopes down to a small crevice at the far end. One would not believe that the simple crevice is, in fact, hiding some mystery. Hesitantly crawling through this crevice one reaches a rather well-shaped tunnel, possibly hand-hewn on the hard metallic rock! It appears to be a thoughtfully camouflaged tunnel. One can go some distance through this dark tunnel, but naturally one would not venture much in such a strange region.

Unforgettable Heights of Mystic Charm

After visiting the Ganapathi Guha, the pilgrim proceeds to the mountain top. As he walks on, he comes across inspiring spectacles - deep gorges, mountain ranges, forest scenes, all steeped in a calm, ethereal beauty as if the whole Nature is absorbed in a blissful meditation. How mysterious is the primordial beauty of Mother Nature! Rolls of grayish clouds dash against the mountain slopes and surge up to the top to give the pilgrim a welcoming embrace in their misty grip. And Io! Suddenly comes to the view at a distance a lonely granite structure – Shankara Peedam – like a magic castle in a fairy tale! And the pilgrim speeds up his pace. He is on the very top, atop the peak of Kudajaadri!

Better not to make an attempt to describe the sight from here. It is an ineffable experience of beauty of Nature merging with the beauty within.

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The path that leads further up - to the peak of Kudajaadri
(Photo: Jurgen Berg)

Ganapathi Guha: The mysterious mountain cave. (Photo: Jurgen Berg)

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The Shankara Peedam

This is the inside of the roof of Shankara Peedam. The pattern of arrangement of the stones here resembles a **Meru** - a three dimensional form of the mystic design ***Srichakram***. The entire structure is not made of the hard metallic stones found here, but of pure granite, which might have been brought there from far below by the unknown builders. It is believed to be built at the place where Sri Aadi Shankaraachaarya immersed himself in the awareness of Reality. It is also known as the Sarvajna Peedam which may be an abbreviation of Sarva Yajna Peedam, so called because at this very sacred place ancient Rishi-s had performed many a *yajnam* - eleborate rituals to invoke the spiritual powers of the Infinite Supreme.

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One resides in infinity here. One is immersed in the total life of Nature – of the forests, lakes, paddy fields, villages, distant cities, the sea and the infinite sky. Far below, towards the west, one gets a glorious view of the shrine of Sri Mookambika and beyond that, the blue expanse of the ocean.

Shivaraatri Atop Kudajaadri

In the auspicious Shivaraatri night a few pilgrims stay on the mountaintop around camp fires while cold winds lash from all sides.

The scenes of sunrise and sunset viewed from the Kudajaadri heights will ever linger in the mind. The Sun-god's chariot at last reaches the western horizon above the expanse of the distant sea. It lingers there in fiery splendour – a splendid communion between the awe-inspiring mountains and the lord of the endless sky. As the sea and the Sun merge each other in a colourful mystery, the waves of night begin to fill the valleys and lash against the mountain slopes. Down, down below, oil lamps glitter in graceful glory in the shrine of Sri Mookambika. Twinkling lights appear in villages, in distant cities and in the ships moving in the sea. Some shrubs in the deep jungles seem to emit a strange misty glow. What is that commotion in the forests! As the darkness reveals its rich mystery, the pilgrims immerse themselves in singing the hymns of the Divine Mother.

It is midnight. The winds bring with them the mild, sweet fragrance of forest flowers. Suddenly emerge from somewhere vague sounds of drums and gongs! Are they the performance of ethereal beings in some invisible world! The sounds seem to be coming nearer. Swinging spots of lights are seen at a distance, slowly coming through the slopes towards the peak. It is the procession from the temple of Bhairavi – the fierce Goddess

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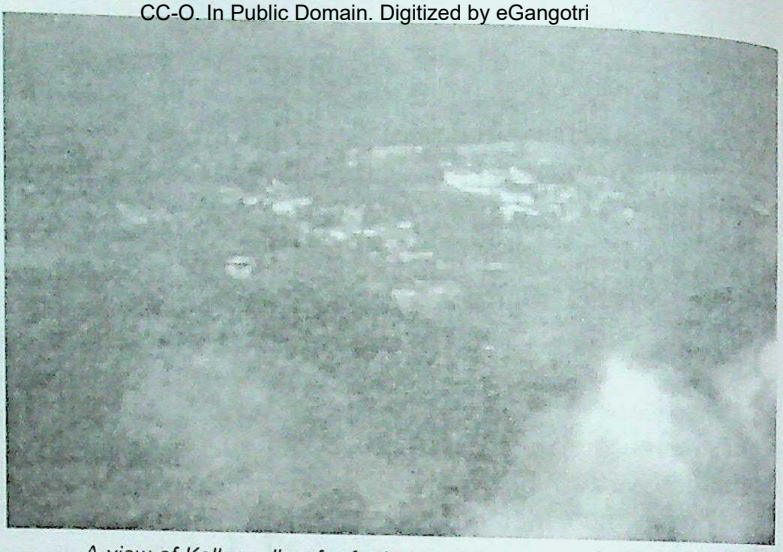
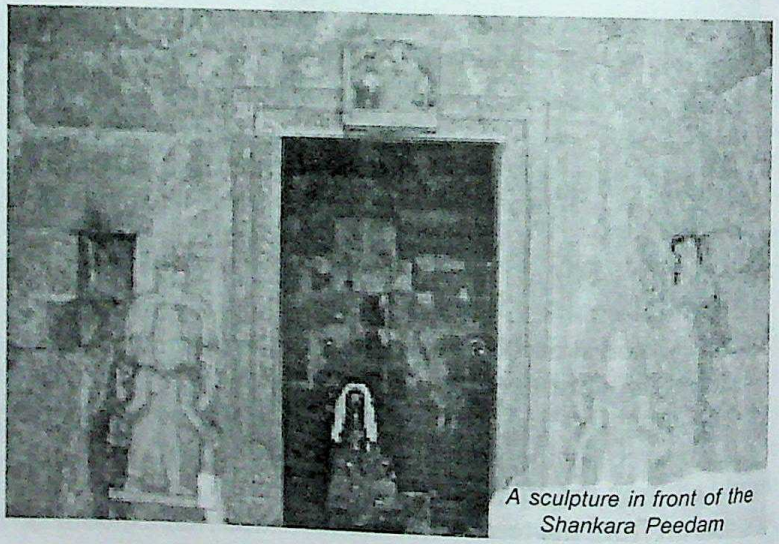


A view of Kollur valley, far far below, form atop Kudajaadri peak (Photo: Jurgen Berg)



A sculpture in front of the Shankara Peedam

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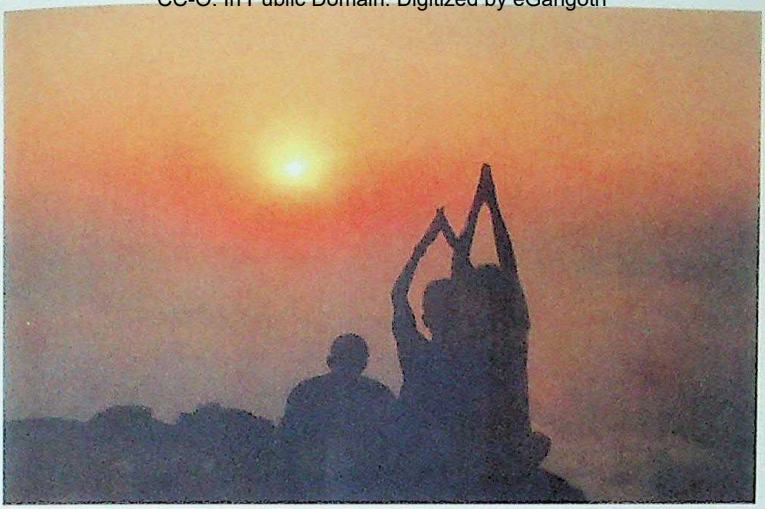

Obeisance to the splendrous Presence at dusk in abounding solitude. (Photo: Srikant)

This is a sacred region where the spiritual explorers, the Rishi-s in congenial solitude journeyed into the deeper realms of human consciousness and discovered the great facts of life and of the universe. Every sand of this mountain is sacred and should be maintained so. Wherever man steps his foot, he often spoils Nature's primeval grace either in the name of development or through sheer vandalism. The signs of human callousness to Nature are evident now-a-days in Kudajaadri too! Let every visitor be aware of his/her obligation to Mother Nature as her dear offspring. The place should never be allowed to degrade into an ordinary tourist spot, where people gather for trivial pleasues. A *tapobhoomi*, a place for the inward pilgrimage to Truth, where man can derive inspiration to find the deeper meaning of his life and experience his ecstatic inner unity with the Eternal Reality.

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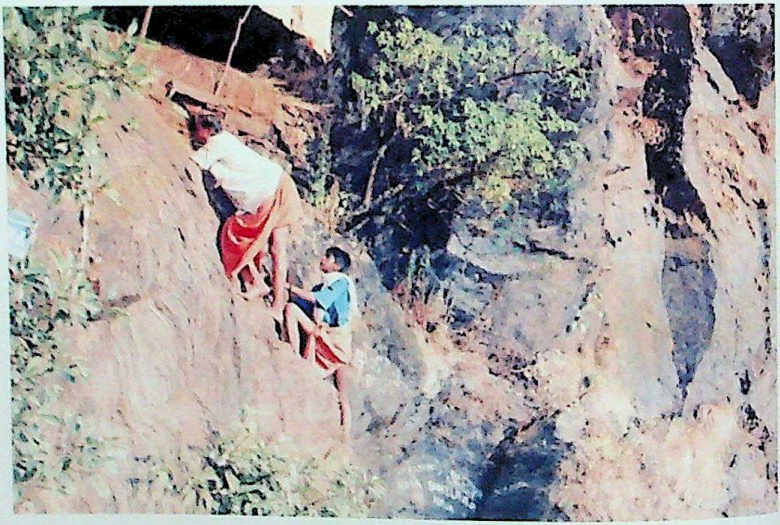
The mid-mountain cave, Chitramoola. (Photo: Jurgen Berg)

Pilgrims climbing to the Chitramoola cave. (Photo: Srikant)



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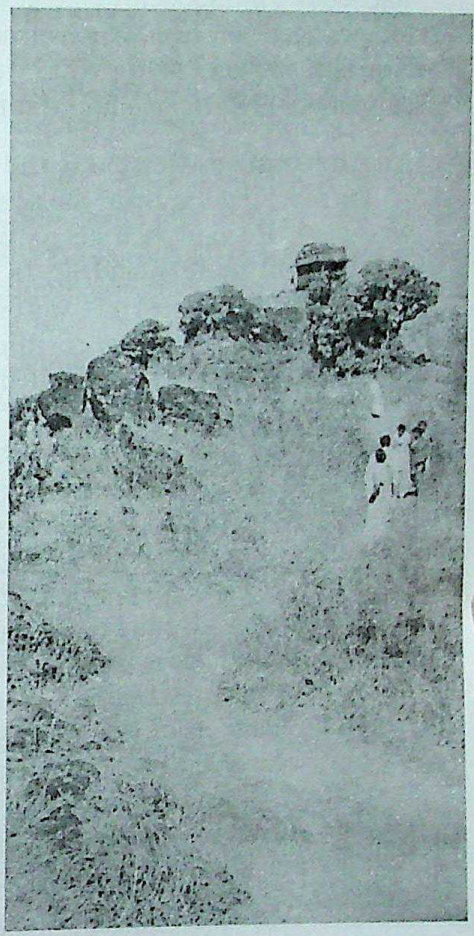
who shatters the darkness in the human mind. In the front there is a huge oil torch. The light has reached the mountaintop. As the world slumbers in the overwhelming darkness, the brilliant torch is fixed atop the Kudajaadri peak illuminating the auspicious Shivaraatri, which every year reminds mankind of the evolutionary possibility of awakening human consciousness to the freedom of spiritual Enlightenment.



Far away, in villages, in cities and in many a sacred temple, thousands must be seeing the glorious splendour.

The mountains again immerse themselves in the silence of the night. The night passes its phases – *yaamas* – to transform itself as the sacred early hours of the *Brahma-muhoortham*. Suddenly all eyes are fixed on the eastern sky – a streak of bright saffron on the pitch dark horizon, the flaming flag of Sun-god's chariot.

And what a transformation it brings on the

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earth! The earth and the sky turn to be a boundless milky ocean of clouds with waves and ripples in solemn stillness. The mountain tops project here and there like islands in the sea. The eastern horizon turns pink, crimson and then glow with a reddish splendour. And suddenly emerges the auspicious, golden-red, life-giving, fiery wheel. Who will not then, from the depth of his heart chant the ancient Rigvedic hymn: "Let our meditation be on the glorious Light of Savithri. May this light illumine our mind."

An Adventurous Descent to the Chitramoola Cave

On reaching the top of the peak, the pilgrim's mind turns westward. He views the steep western slope – a precipice of about 1500 meters ending in the deep forests of the Ambaavanam. Almost midway on this slope is the holy cave, Chitramoola, where, according to tradition, Sri Aadi Shankaraachaarya had meditated for several days. It is, of course, a hazardous descent. Yet I have seen people even past seventy going down safely to reach the sacred spot.

A little care, of course, is necessary and there are plenty of projecting stones and roots for foot-hold and branches for support. Every step should be careful and firm, resisting the temptation to speed up. Don't hesitate to sit and move if necessary. It is adventurous indeed, and one may feel one is going down to some mysterious world of grandmother's tales. At last the pilgrim reaches the foot of the cave – a gaping opening between gigantic, hard, magnesium-rich boulders. A few feet of careful ascent on the boulders takes him to the very cave, where in solitude, amidst the wondrous scenic charm, many a recluse, must have made his bold inward pilgrimage to Truth. Below the cave sprawl the lush, almost impenetrable forests of the Ambaavanam.

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A remarkable feature of this unique mid-mountain cave is the perennial dramatic flow of water towards the southern part of the opening. It originates somewhere near the mountain top, flows down towards a convenient part of the cave as if to supply the needs of the occupant in the cave. Except this there is no trace of water anywhere nearby.

Tradition has it that the watercourse sprouted miraculously to serve Sri Aadi Shankaraachaarya, when he was meditating in the cave.

Maintain the Sacredness of Kudajaadri

The sublime, lofty peak of Kudajaadri, visible from far-off distances, with its dense forests hiding many caves and relics of hermitages proclaim that it was a *tapo-bhoomi*, the land of meditative exploration in the hoary past, the mystic history of which is not well known today. It is a symbol of human striving after Truth through millennia. Who could have been those people who erected the rust-proof iron pillar, who hewed the crevice-camouflaged tunnel in the Ganapathi Guha? Several ancient mysteries are receiving a reverential reassessment today. Our ancient philosophical symbols, places, Puraana-s and the texts of traditional sciences, if well searched into, will yield gems of knowledge that may creatively revolutionize life in today's strife-torn world.

It is said that there is a project to develop Kudajaadri. However, let us hope that the place will never be allowed to degrade into an ordinary tourist spot, where people gather for evanescent pleasures. It is a *tapo-bhoomi* where man can find a deeper meaning in his life, acquire spiritual strength and inner peace. Every sand of this mysterious mountain is sacred and should be maintained so. Inspiring boards may be kept in several

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points reminding the visitor of his sacred duty.

Spiritual striving is consciously or unconsciously inherent in every living being. Human mind invariably needs spiritual nourishment to function effectively and to evole to higher levels of consciousness. Journey to holy places will charge the mind with spiritual strength, removing much of the oppressive tension of the mind. It is of vital importance that we must maintain the sanctity and natural beauty of such life-nourishing places.

Arasana Kund

About 15 kms north-west of Sri Mookambika shrine, deep in the forests there is a sacred pond called Arasana Kund. The pilgrim first treks his way for about four kilometers through the road extending northwards from the backside of the temple, and on reaching a place called Dali turns left to take a narrow forest path leading eastwards. This path ends in a channel and the pilgrim wades his way through it with overhead arches of bamboo and cane that flourish on both sides, to reach a shallow mountain stream, the Kaasi river.

The pilgrim has to walk up the stream placing his steps from one projecting rock to another, and in this process he may sometimes have to use his hands also and move forward like a quadruped. On both sides are flourishing tropical forests. One may feel a strange sense of having been placed in some primeval period in earth's history! At some places he has to leave the river and climb the mountain slopes before coming down again to the river to continue his ascent. After proceeding for about an hour like this he sees the sun breaking through the foliage, painting a distant waterfall with rainbow hues. It falls in a large pond – the goal of the pilgrim, Arasana Kund. He climbs further and reaches there.

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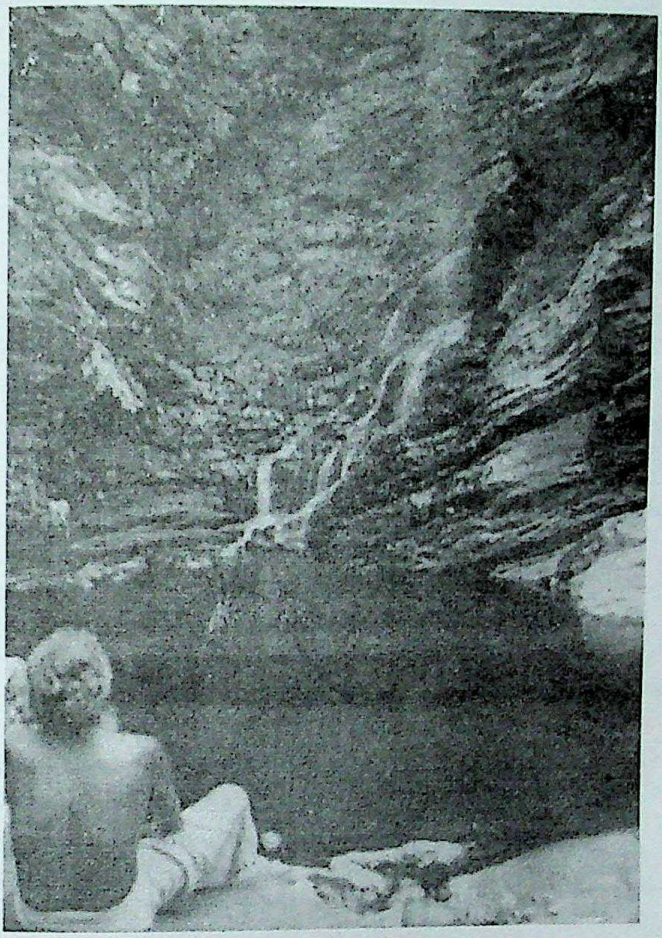

Arasana Kund, the 'Pond of Turmeric' (Photo: R. Srinivasan)

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Permeated with the scent of forest flowers, the surroundings of the pond give him a perfect sense of spiritual solitude and peace. It is the Kaashi river that falls into the pond from quite a height. It overflows it and moves downwards to join, in due course, Agni -theertham at Kollur and then merge into the holy Souparnika. The centre of this small lake is said to be very deep and the legend has it that the Goddess after destroying the demon Mookaasura immersed Her golden chariot in it. Taking bath in the cool water is invigorating. One may notice for a few moments a light golden hue over the body when one takes bath here – considered a unique phenomenon. That is why the pond is known as Arasana Kund, the 'Pond of the Turmeric'. (When going to such unfrequented places as Arasana Kund, Govinda Theertham, etc., one should have a guide).

Govinda Theertham – Nature's Unique Shower Bath

About 18 kms from Kollur, towards the south-east, on the southern side of the Kudajaadri peak, is the Govinda Theertham, amidst the deep forests of Ambhaavanam. From Kollur the pilgrim may take a route through the southern foothills of Kudajaadri. He can also choose another route by going first to an agricultural village, Mudoor, via Jadkal by bus (about an hour journey from Kollur) and walking about five kilometers to reach the forest. On entering the jungles, an hour climb through thick forest terrains takes one to Govinda Theertham.

I had been to the place a few times and on one occasion had a sturdy 83 year-old with the energy of a youth and the alertness and humility of a sage, as the guide. When one among us asked him whether he could save anything out of his profession, he just had a loud, hearty laugh, enigmatic like that of a Zen monk, which appeared as if he was telling us that he could save his soul while

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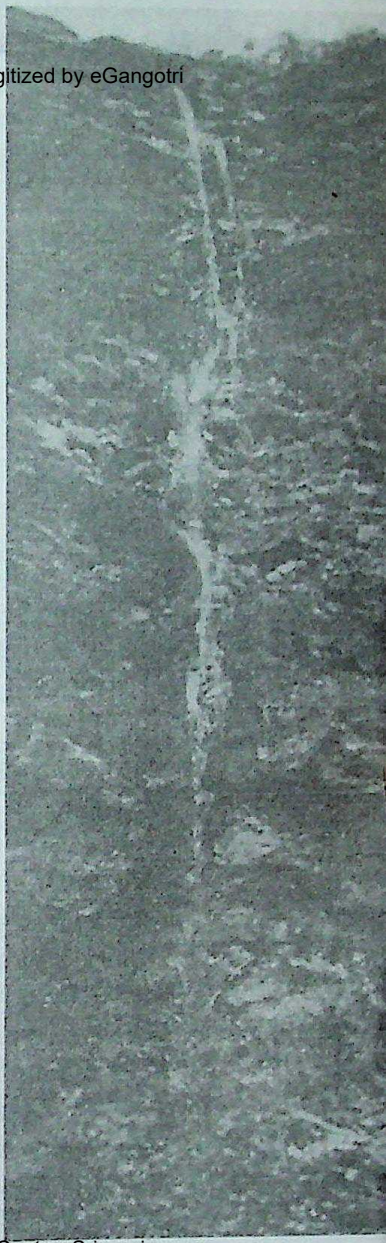

tauntingly reminding us that even in the midst of that perilous forest our thoughts are occupied with the other savings, forgetting the most reassuring wealth in us – the Source Eternal – Mother Mookambika who we are in our utmost being, and for the recollection of which, in fact, we are making all these pilgrimages.

Clutching the boughs, climbing the boulders, the pilgrim advances to the last stage and suddenly stands spellbound by a colossal, breath-taking vision. He forgets all his struggles enthralled by the spectacle – a forest river falling headlong as if from the skies through a high gorge and being swirled by the strong forest winds, the sheet of water swinging to and fro like a long piece of cloth, part of it transforming into vaporous spray and rising to join the clouds, while the rest splitting into millions of drops to fall as a natural shower.

After the customary breaking of coconuts, the pilgrim takes really a celestial bath in that unique shower bath of Nature, loudly chanting the Lord's Name, 'Govinda, Govinda'.

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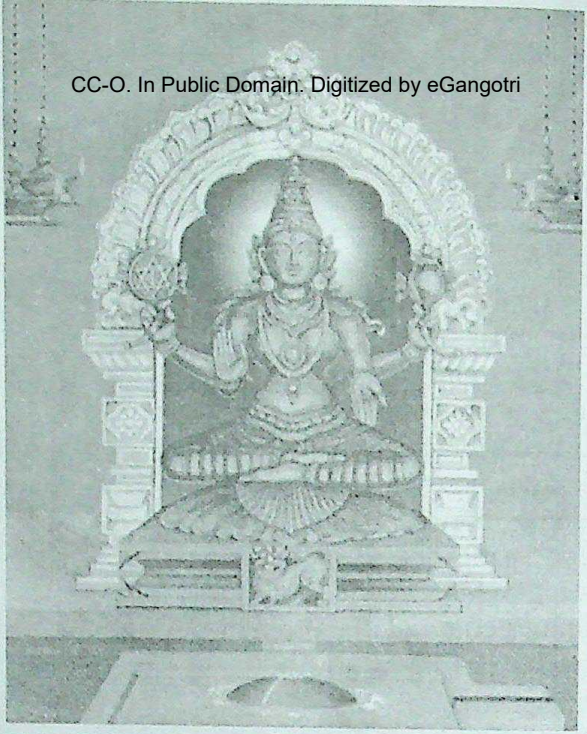

Sri Mahalakshi Ashtakam

TO A CLOSE OBSERVER the *Sthotra-s* – the hymns on the glory of the Divine – as the *Lalithaa-sahasranaama-sthothram,* and *Vishnu-sahasranaama-sthothram*, etc., will reveal their depth and evolutionary significance. With their subtle influence on the mind, they help the all-round progress of man. (As the mathematical symbols may seem meaningless to one ignorant of mathematics, to a superficial observer the symbolic letters of a *manthram* or *sthothram* may appear to be of no import). Sages of yore evolved consciousness-expanding spiritual formulae in easily chantable symbolic verses so that spiritual wisdom should survive the passage of time and serve generations. The inquiring

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minds will find their inner meaning; and those who repeat them daily will experience spiritual unfoldment. The daily repetition disciplines the mind, makes it bright, serene and efficient.

Sthothra-s promote devotion – reverence for the Supreme Reality. An effort for communion with our inner Self, true devotion is the mother of life-expanding knowledge. It has nothing to do with religious fundamentalism. The great Hindu Yogis, Sufis of Islam, and the Christian mystics talk in the same transcendental terms about God and the oneness of His creations. Devotion leads rational enquiry to new expanding horizons. It is complementary to rational wisdom.

The following *Sthothram* from the ancient *Skanda Puraana* is in adoration of Sri Mookambika (Kolapureshi). If chanted daily, the sages assure, it will bring divine guidance, harmony and prosperity.

नमस्ते जगद्धात्रि सद्ब्रह्मरूपे
नमस्ते हरोपेन्द्रधात्रादिवन्द्ये।
नमस्ते प्रपन्नेष्टदानैक दक्षे
नमस्ते महालक्ष्मि कोलापुरेशि।। १

Namasthe Jagath-dhaathri sad-Brahma-roope
Namasthe Haropendra-daathraadi-vandhye
Namasthe prapanneshta-daanaika-dakshe
Namsthe Mahaalakshmi Kolaapureshi

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O Mother of the Universe, the Supreme Brahman, we prostrate before Thee, who is worshipped by Siva, Upendra, Brahma and other Deities. Prostrations to Thee who fulfils the desires of those taking refuge in Thee. Prostrations to Thee, O Mahaalakshmi, the Goddess of Kolaapura.

विधिः कृत्तिवासाहरिर्विश्वमेतत्
सृजत्यत्ति पातीतियत्तत्प्रसिद्धम्
कृपानोकनादेव ते शक्तिरूपे।
नमस्ते महालक्ष्मि कोलापुरेशि।। २

Viddhi Kriththivaasaa Harirvishwamethath
Srijathyaththi paatheethi yaththath-prasidham
Kripaalokanaadeva they shakthi-roope
Namsthe Mahaalakshmi Kolaapurayshi

This universe is created by Lord Brahma. Lord Siva annithilates it. Lord Vishnu protects it. But O Mahaalakshmi, it is with the benign look of Thee, whose form is Power itself, they perform all those acts. Prostrations to Thee, O Mahaalakshmi, the Goddess of Kolaapura.

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त्वया मायया व्याप्तमेतत्समस्तम्
धृतं लीलया देवि कुक्षौ हि विश्वम्।
स्थितं बुद्धिरूपेण सर्वत्र जन्तौ
नमस्ते महालक्ष्मि कोलापुरेशि।। ३

Thvayaa maayayaa vyaapthamethath samastham
Dhritham leelayaa Devi kukshou hi vishwam
Sthitham budhiroopena sarvathra janthou
Namsthe Mahaalakshmi Kolaapureshi

This whole universe is permeated with Thy Divine Maaya, while, O Devi, Thou bear the entire universe playfully in thy womb. Thou reside in every being in the form of intelligence. Prostrations to Thee, O Mahaalakshmi, Goddess of Kolaapura.

यया भक्तवर्गा हि लक्ष्यन्त एते
त्वयात्र प्रकामं कृपापूर्णदृष्ट्या।
अतो गीयसे देवि लक्ष्मीरितित्वं
नमस्ते महालक्ष्मि कोलापुरेशि।। ४

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Yayaa bhakthavargaa hi lakshyantha aethe
Tvayaathra prakaamam Kripaapoornadrishtyaa
Atho geeyase Devi Lakshmeerithi thvam
Namsthe Mahaalakshmi Kolaapureshi

O Devi, as Thou cast thy benign glance on all Thy devotees, Thou art called Mahaalakshmi. Prostration to Thee O Mahaalakshmi, Goddess of Kolapura.

पुनर्वाक्पटुत्वादिहीना हि मूका
नरैस्तैर्निकामं खलु प्रर्थ्यसेयत्।
निजेष्टाप्तये तच्च मूकांबिकात्वं
नमस्ते महालक्ष्मि कोलापुरेशि।। ५

Puanar-vaak-patuthvaadi-heenaa hi mookaa
Naraisthair-nikaamam khalu praardhyase yath
Nijeshtaapthaye thachcha Mookaambikaa thvam
Namsthe Mahaalakshmi Kolaapureshi

Those who lack intelligence and power of expression pray earnestly for Thy Grace and Thou raise them endowing them with talents and wisdom. Therefore, Thou art known as Mookambika. Prostrations to Thee O Mahaalakshmi, Goddess of Kolaapura.

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यदद्वैतरूपात्परब्रह्मणस्त्वं
समुत्थापुनर्विश्वलीलोद्यमस्था।
तदाहूर्जनास्त्वां हि गौरीं कुमारीं
नमस्ते महालक्ष्मि कोलापुरेशि।। ६

Yad-advaitharoopaath-Parabrahmanasthvam
Samudhaa punarnvishwa leelodyamasthaa
Thadaahoor janaasthvaam hi Gaureem Kumaareem
Namsthe Mahaalakshmi Kolaapureshi

O Devi, Thou manifested Thyself from the One indivisible Brahman. Thou then engaged in the play of creation. As one engaging in creative activity, Thou art called Gouri and as the playful one, Thou art called Kumaari. Prostrations to Thee, O Mahaalakshmi, Goddess of Kolapura.

हरीशादिदेहोत्थतेजोमयप्र-
स्फुरच्चक्रराजाख्यलिंगस्वरूपे।
महायोगि कोलर्षिहृत्पद्मगेहे
नमस्ते महालक्ष्मि कोलापुरेशि।। ७

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Hareeshaadi-dehothdha thejomayapra-
Spurachchakra-raajaakhya-lingaswaroope
Mahaayogi Kolarshi-hrithpadma geyhe
Namsthe Mahaalakshi Kolaapureshi

Srichakram, the king of the mystic symbols, which emanated from the very splendour of Lord Mahaavishnu, Lord Siva and other Deities is Thy Form. Prostrations to Thee, O Mahaalakshmi Goddess of Kolaapura, who resides in the lotus heart of the Mahaa-yogi Kola Maharshi.

नमः शङ्कचक्राभयाभीष्टहस्ते
नमस्ते अम्बिके गौरि पत्मासनास्थे।
नमः स्वर्णवर्णे प्रसन्ने शरण्ये
नमस्ते महालक्ष्मि कोलापुरेशि।। ८

Namah samkha-chakraabhayaa-bheeshta hasthe
Namasthe Ambike Gauri padmaasanasthe
Namah swarna-varne prasanne sharanye
Namsthe Mahaalakshmi Kolaapureshi.

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Prostrations to Thee, O Devi who hold in Thy four hands the conch, the discus and the mystic symbols *Abhaya* and *Abheeshta Mudra-s*. Prostration to Thee, Mother, who sits in the mystic pose of *Padmaasana*. Prostrations to Thee, the graceful refuge of all, the golden hued, the Blissful. Prostrations to Thee, O Mahaalakshmi, Goddess of Kolaapura.

इदं स्तोत्ररत्नं कृतं सर्वदैव
हृदि त्वां समाधाय लक्ष्यष्टकं यः।
पठेन्नित्यमेष व्रजत्याशु लक्ष्मीं
सुविद्यां च सत्यं भवत्याः प्रसादात्।।

Edam sthothra-rathnam kritham sarvadaiva
Hridi thvaam samaadhaaya Lakshmyashtakam yah
Padennithyamesha vrajathyaashu Lakshmeem
Suvidhyaam cha sathyam bhavathyaah
prasaadhaath.

Those who chant everyday this great *Sthothram* that emanated from the devoted hearts of all the Deva-s will be blessed with prosperity and knowledge by the Grace of Sri Mookambika. Know this to be certain.

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OTHER BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR

1. ***'Alphabet of Reality'* (Significance of Divine Forms) Series:**
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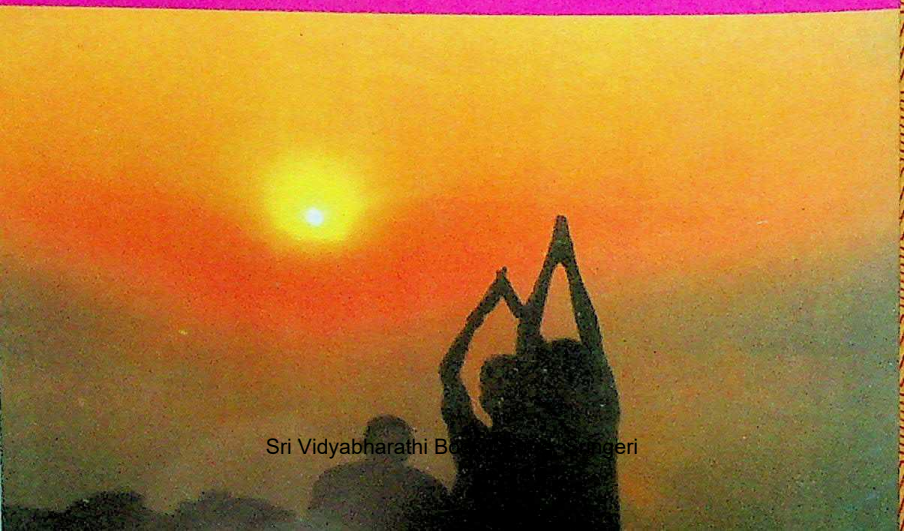
From immemorial, the temple of Sri Mookambika, the Divine Mother, has been a perennial Source of mighty spiritual energy activating the dormant spiritual potentials of man in his evolutionary march towards Fulfilment. The Divine Mother gives powerful stimulus to countless pilgrims in their quest for Blessedness, Perfection an Freedom.

The book lucidly presents the salient features of invoking the Mother Principle immanent in the universe. It expounds some subtle aspects of the hoary spiritual wealth and wisdom of India, her immortal vision and message to the whole humanity.



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